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1919
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PUBLISHED
TWICE A MONTH

Adventure

William Patterson White
Hugh Pendexter
The Pinkertons
Robert J. Pearsall
E. S. Pladwell
S. B. H. Hurst
Gordon Young
Farnham Bishop
Hapsburg Liebe

FIRST OCTOBER ISSUE, 1919
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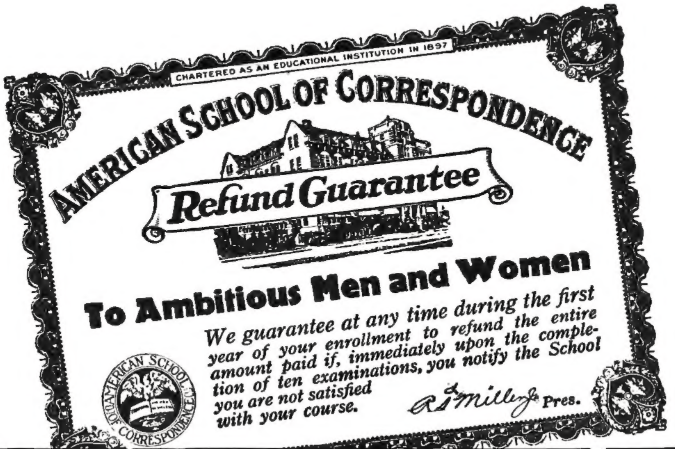

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Adventure
Vol. 23, No. 1
Oct. 3, 1919

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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

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The Sea Lawyer *A Complete Novelette* . . . . . . **E. S. Pladwell** 1

He is a lawyer, the member of many high-toned clubs. But that doesn't stop *Paddy Lunt* from slugging him over the head with a blackjack and dragging him aboard the "dirty ol' *Belle of Hindustan*," where suddenly and violently begin the strangest days of *Roger M. Child's* career.

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What is the mysterious plague that has come upon the little Chinese village? *Hazard* and *Partridge*, on the trail of the Ko Lao Hui, find they must answer the riddle or die.

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When five men ride up to *Dot Lorimer's* ranch-house, *Red Kane* feels his trigger-finger itch, for they are looking for *Ben Lorimer*, and the charge is murder. But *Dot* proves her wits are quick—this time. The preceding part of this story of the West is briefly retold in story form.

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"Death walks along the Creek trail," says the *Jumper*. But *Chucky Jack Sevier* presses on, knowing what it means to turn back. The first part of this story based on the life of a real pioneer is briefly retold in story form.

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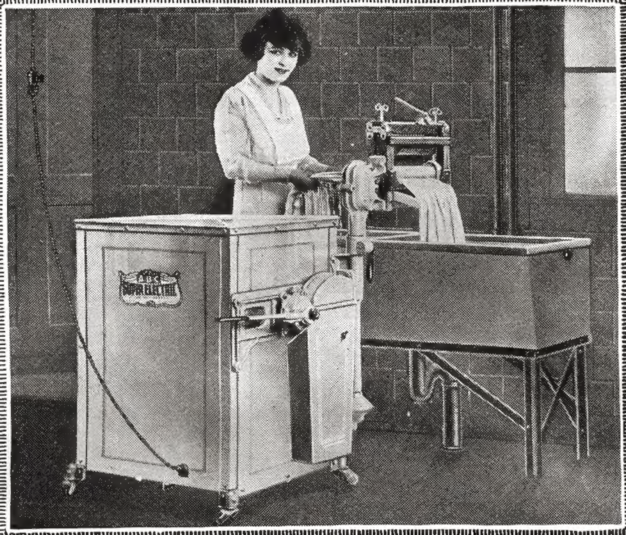
IN BILL'S, in Alexandria, a Chinese mandarin and an English nobleman sit playing chess. The game is deep, subtle. But in the room is being played a game deeper and more subtle than that which sends the kings and pawns about the board—a game that is to take *Monty* and *Will Yerkes* and the others through perilous ways to where lie the ancient treasures of Jerusalem. "Barabbas Island," by Talbot Mundy. A complete novel. Next issue.

OUTSIDE his office lay the bloated bodies of many natives—victims of the tropic plague. Death had walked about in Guayaran, the South American graveyard. Inside the station, *"Chimborazo" Harmon*, manager of the G. & A. railroad, cursed the pestilence that made it impossible for him alone to operate the Ecuadorian railroad. But through his giant body ran that *streak of lean*—that spirit which knows no fear—that made him fiercely fight against the plotting of revolutionists and the circumstances of Fate. "The Streak of Lean," by Edgar Young. A complete novelette.



This photograph illustrates one of the big features of the A-B-C Super Electric—its All-position wringer. The operator is wringing from rinse water to blue water, while another batch of clothes is being washed—possible only with the All-position wringer. No washer can render 100% service without this feature.

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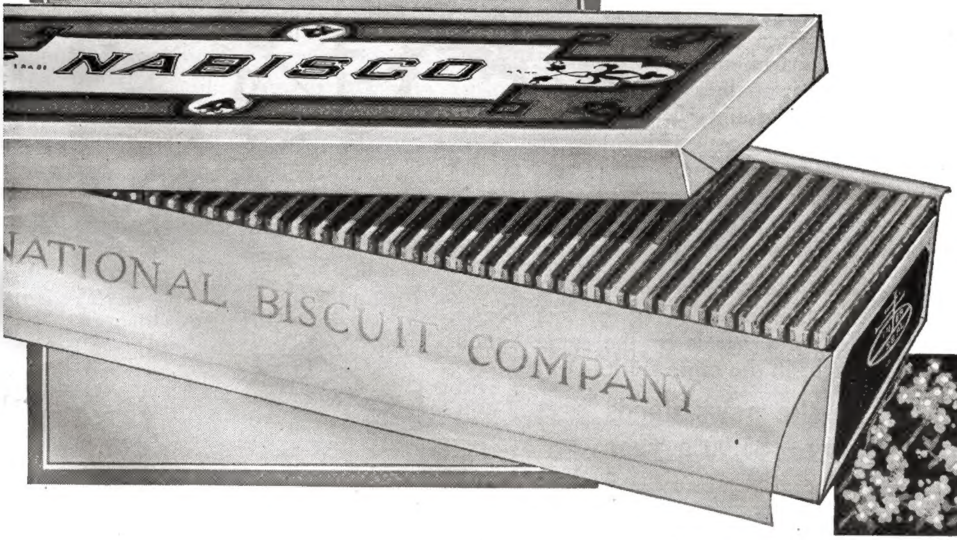
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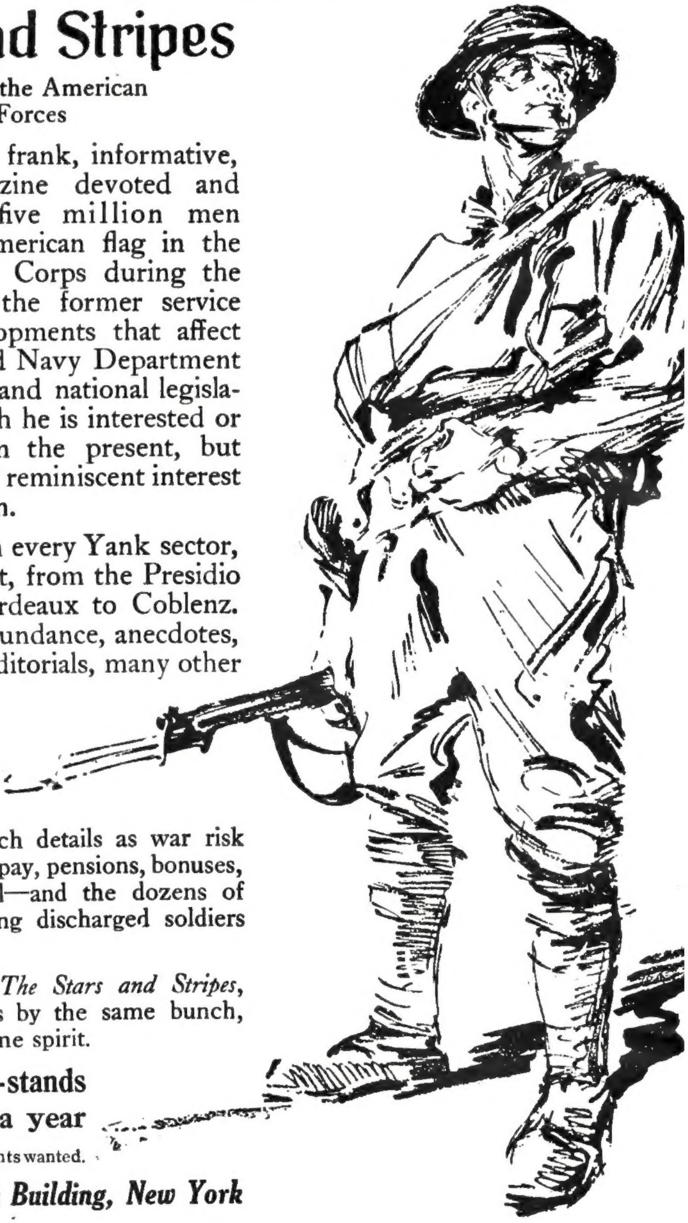
A WEEKLY FOR THE NEW CIVILIAN

To be conducted by the former editorial council of

The Stars and Stripes

Official newspaper of the American
Expeditionary Forces



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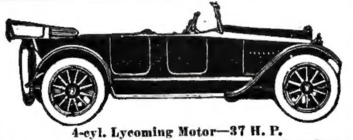

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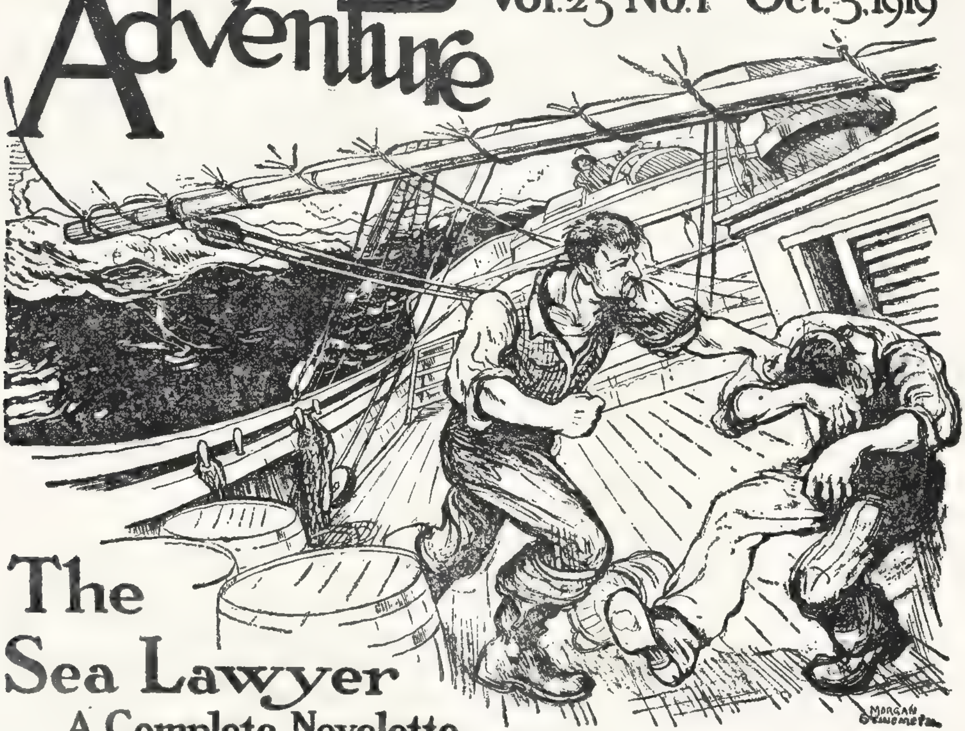

The Sea Lawyer

A Complete Novelette

by E. S. Pladwell

Author of "Highly Civilized," "The Boss of Mirage," etc.

ROGER M. CHILDS, counselor at law and member of many high-toned clubs, was in strange and smelly surroundings that clashed with his personality and almost made him wish he had not come. He was well nourished and well groomed, with the bearing of a man who had been a gentleman through all his thirty-five years and feared no policeman.

Florid-faced, mustached and compactly built, he possessed an air of distinction despite his medium height, and looked like ready money. About him were ash cans, broken fences, mud puddles, board walks, cheap saloons, dim street lamps and paintless frame buildings. He did not belong here.

But, as attorney for the estate of the late Charles J. Hunt, Childs was intent on finding one Peter Niddle, able seaman and a beneficiary under the Charles J. Hunt will. Niddle, in a barkentine, had raised the Golden Gate more than a week past, but thereafter he had joined the famous legion of drunken sailors.

Rumor now whispered that Niddle, having jettisoned all his pay, was about due at a water-front lodging-house, where certain genii would soon render him unconscious and waft him magically into the hold of some outward bound ship. Roger M. Childs desired to meet Niddle before the magic was performed. The attorney wanted to wind up the affairs of the Charles J. Hunt estate and as soon as Niddle received his share the attorney's task was done.

It was only a side issue with Childs anyhow. He had devoted to this errand an hour of idleness granted him between a banquet of the Knightly Order of the Sacred Oracle and the raising of the curtain at the Tivoli Opera House. Now he rather regretted it.

He would have sent his clerk, but that

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functionary was away on another case. He might have arrived in his cab, but he felt that a polished and monogrammed vehicle would be *de trop* in this neighborhood, so the cab awaited him several blocks away.

Thus Roger M. Childs happened to be walking amid the water-front dives and whistling a few nervous bars from a new opera, "Robin Hood," which was then just coming out. It was 1892.

The stars that stared from brilliant heavens descended upon Roger M. Childs with a crash. Little sparks danced before his eyes and flickered into darkness. A roar smote his ears, followed by a great silence.

Paddy Lunt, stocky and rat-faced, dragged the unconscious attorney from the board walk into the privacy of a side door. Paddy put his black-jack into his pocket, lit the spluttering gas jet in the hallway and collected the first profits of his enterprise—a gold watch, a diamond pin, a signet ring, a watch-fob with a cabalistic design, two hundred dollars in money and a card-case full of data which was contemptuously tossed into an ash can. Then, noting a familiar step approaching, Paddy Lunt straightened and prepared for honest commerce.

The newcomer was a stout, middle-aged, cold-eyed personage with red hair and a hooked nose.

"Humph!" he snorted as he prodded Roger M. Childs with his foot. "A dude! Is that the best you could do?"

"Well, you said to git anything on two legs," retorted Paddy righteously. "Are you scared of trouble about him?"

"N—no. He'll not amount to much if he's down here this time o' day. Anyhow, it's done. He may be a dude, but Skipper McPhee'll train him! Carry him down to the dock. We gotta git him aboard before tide ebbs or I'm out my money."

"Do I get mine?" questioned Paddy truculently.

He knew he was dealing with the waterfront's smoothest boarding-house keeper, who shanghaied men in wholesale lots. Therefore Paddy had to guard his rights.

"Oh, you'll git yours!" promised the master crimp. "Come on! Git him into the Whitehall!"

His eyes were steel-cold but his face was smiling, and Paddy believed the face. Thus it was that Roger M. Childs awoke with a vicious headache in a dirty, smelly hole where the light from a distant round window just grayed the darkness. Childs, with his mind groping, raised his splitting head. The fumes of alcohol overpowered him and he gulped and tried to collect his thoughts.

Something stirred alongside him. Sounds became recognizable—snores and queer murmurings. In alarm the attorney sat up. But that vicious smell of cheap whisky smote him like a club. He groped about speculatively. His right hand touched his own body and he noted a queer feel to the cloth. It was coarse and rough and cheap, and his boots were clumsy things with the toes gone!

Childs experienced a "gone" feeling. He felt as if he were in another world. He was in the forecastle of one of those ships that had to steal crews because crews would never come willingly! He had been knocked out, drugged, reclothed, transfigured, transported here and saturated to match the general smell of the forecastle!

* * *

THE attorney felt a chill of apprehension and fear. It nauseated him. The thought of grueling work amid loathsome surroundings made his heart falter. He found himself tossing and writhing and mumbling.

"Shut up!" came a voice from the darkness forward.

It was a gloomy, quavering voice charged with deep disgust. Childs was about to gurgle a reply when the other spoke again, voicing utter amazement.

"And the dirty clam-digger grabbed me! Me!"

"Ah—I beg pardon?"

"The slinkin', blinkin' son of a cook hauled me aboard like a crab in a net! Me! He'll regret this day! Oh, he'll regret this day!"

"Who?" inquired the attorney.

"'Cylone' McPhee, dang his blanked walrus hide! I'll see to him! Oh, I'll settle his hash! They can't do them things to me! Not to me!"

Childs gathered that this was a personage, and he voiced his regrets.

"You're sorry, are ye?" rumbled the other, arising and girding himself for war. "Well, there's somebuddy else goin' to git sorry right now! I'll see about this! I'll see if they'll shanghai me! I'll learn 'em a thing or two!"

The man's stout form stumbled over the attorney and some other querulous persons and stormed toward the deck outside. He arrived at the door. It was barred. He pushed with his shoulder. It did not budge. He ripped off the side of a dirty bunk and hammered. Still the barrier would not yield. He smashed and banged some more.

Suddenly a bolt was drawn, the door opened, and the warrior toppled outward with it. A tall, lantern-jawed blond man walking in sea-boots and carrying two water buckets let him fall to the deck and then dropped the buckets and kicked him.

The victim yelled, shook his fist and roared forth some highly personal profanity. That seemed to arouse the tall man's interest. Impersonally and impartially, intent only on doing a good job, the silent blond person kicked the other from port to starboard and then back to port again, where he lay still and groaned.

Thereupon the tall personage broke into the forecastle and spewed forth cold water from the buckets, grabbing the half-unconscious men by the shoulders and sloshing their faces with it.

"Aft!" he roared. "All of ye!"

Some of the half-dazed rabble started to rise, cursing incoherently. One tried to strike back. A big fist felled him and he was kicked toward the deck outside, after which the tall blond person systematically hauled, mauled and booted his nondescript crowd out of the gloomy forecastle and jolted them aft, where they huddled at length under the break of the poop, a forlorn and stupefied mob.

Childs avoided the boots and slipped out ahead of the others. A cool salt wind struck his face like a tonic. It ventilated the cobwebs in his brain and cleared away the headache and the awful alcohol smell. The attorney drank it as a thirsty man drinks water; and when his befuddled brain came toward normal he began to fully realize his awkward predicament.

Above him, towering toward the skies, was a tangle of masts, spars, rigging, rope-ladders and a few dirty sails, which, bellying before a brisk west wind, steadied the big three-master on her course until the rest of the canvas could be spread. Westward and northward was water and sky, world without end. Eastward, off the starboard quarter, the brown-green hills of the California coast could just barely be seen, tapering away toward the southward. And between that land and the vessel was nothing but water and sea-gulls!

"She's a 'ell ship, that's what she is!" came a high-pitched cockney voice alongside the attorney. "I'll tyke me oath, if she wasn't so far offshore I'd try to swim for it!"

The attorney saw a chunky little man alongside him with a friendly though incompetent face, whose bleary eyes seemed to have a look of perpetual alarm. The man's slack jaw was now sagging dolefully.

"What's the name of this ship?" asked Childs.

" 'Er?" The Cockney's wobbly eyes gave the other a pitying glance. "She's the stinkin' old *Belle of 'Industan*—designed by the devil 'imself, built by a cross-eyed Jew, perwisioned with weevil, officered by bucko-mates, and skippered by a ——ish old gorilla as ought to been 'ung fifty times over!"

"The *Belle of Hindustan!*" exclaimed the attorney.

"Oho! You've 'eard of 'er before? I'll wyger you've 'eard little that's good!"

"Neither good nor bad. I came across the ship's name in a matter of law. I'm a lawyer."

The Cockney backed away a few steps and stared. He was inclined to be incredulous. "You a loryer?" He looked Childs over, from his touseled hair to his flapping shoes. "Ho, ho! A loryer!"

"Yes, a lawyer!" snapped the attorney.

"Gorblime!" remarked the puzzled Cockney. "A loryer! Still—there's been things stryngger than that on this 'ere 'ell ship. But you'd best stow that talk—*sss-h!* 'Ere comes 'is bleedin' majesty!"

Up above the wooden rail of the poop a thick-set, bull-necked, black-whiskered figure with a scowling face rolled majestically to the rail, where he stared gloomily upon the blear-eyed assemblage, looking each man over. Finally his lips moved and a deep-toned roar issued from his wide mouth like the bellow of a bull.

"You scum!"

It blew through the men like a blast, making them wince. All but Roger M. Childs. He had decided to explain his case to the master of the ship at once. He therefore stepped forward and tried to express himself in a manner that was dignified, respectful, mandatory, and yet not aggressive enough to ruffle this autocrat's temper.

"Pardon me," said Childs, in a loud tone because of the wind and the creaking of cordage. "You are the captain, I believe? I have been awaiting this opportunity to address you. Through some mistake I have been put aboard this ship. I desire to be set ashore immediately because of very pressing business matters. I realize it may not be easy to grant my re——"

"Get back, you!" bawled the autocrat.

"But——"

The bearded man's face contorted savagely.

"Back!" he exploded. "Stow your lip!"

"But I demand that I be put ashore! I am Roger M. Childs, attorney at law, and chief counsel for the ——"

"Mister McPherson!" bawled the tyrant.

SOMETHING hard crashed into the attorney's jaw. His senses became blurred. He felt quick, sharp impacts in his side. A moment later a big hand grabbed his shoulder, shook him until his teeth rattled, slammed him up against the starboard bulwarks, kicked him again and left him helpless in the scuppers.

The dizzy eyes of Roger M. Childs opened slowly and, when the mists cleared away, he saw the tall blond mate starting toward some one else. The black-bearded autocrat had descended from his eminence and now towered over Childs like a figure of wrath.

"You're a lawyer, hey?" he roared. "I'll have no sea lawyers aboard this ship! Hear that? If you once open your trap I'll keelhaul you!"

He was about to make some further remarks, but an interruption came.

"McPhee!" yelled an angry voice from behind the attorney. "Put me off this blinkin' old tub! Wadda you think yer doin'? You can't do them things to me!"

The black-bearded autocrat turned like a cat. Facing him was a red-headed, middle-aged, stout person with a hooked nose and fat hands, whose stubby fingers were pointing in accusation.

"You can't do them things to me!" he rasped. "Nubuddy does!"

"Well, I have!" roared the black-bearded man. "What are you goin' to do about it?"

The other backed away, changing his tune immediately.

"A thousan' dollars if you'll put me ashore!" he offered.

"*Ra-a-a-a!*" gritted the bearded man. "What do I care for your dirty money? Stow your jaw!"

"A thousan' dollars!" wheedled the other. "Make it fifteen hun'red. You got me here by mistake, McPhee—jest a mistake! See? I'll pass you the money soft and quiet when I gits ashore and then we'll let bygones be bygones—everything snug as a bug in a rug."

"I don't want your dirty money!" thundered McPhee. "Think I'm a crook like you? You'll stay aboard!"

The other cringed and rubbed nervous, ingratiating hands.

"Now, McPhee, what d'ye want to act like that for? Wasn't we friends? Didn't we have lots of snug little deals, like gen'lemen? Ain't you got no gratitood?"

A tenseness in the air warned the attorney that some sort of politics was afoot—that the crew was silently voting against this hook-nosed person and that the latter was trying to make the skipper put him ashore or throw a protective mantle around him. The man was publicly implicating the skipper in past transactions, using the "we" purposely to gain any point he could. To make it stronger, the hook-nosed person reinforced himself with a threat.

"You don't want every boardin'-house keeper from Sitka to Valparaiso to get down on you, do you McPhee? Better lemme go, McPhee. It ain't the square thing to do, McPhee." The voice was wheedling, with a tone that would coax the moss from a rock; but the giant McPhee growled like an angry bulldog.

"Shut up!" he thundered, shaking a fist. "Don't you talk about the square thing, you crooked fat slob! You swine—what did you do to me last voyage out? I asked for men, didn't I? Men—men to work a ship! What did you send me? Two seamen, one coal-heaver, one preacher, two shoe salesmen, one laundryman and a sody-fountain clerk! Huh—I'll teach you to do them tricks to me!"

Despite the dangerous attitude of the skipper, the attorney almost found himself smiling; but the hook-nosed man looked nervous.

“Aw—I sent what I could git!” pleaded the stout one.

“Lemme at him!” shrieked a shrill voice from among the nondescript crew. A stocky, rat-faced person who had apparently just come out of his stupor jumped from the crowd toward the hook-nosed person.

“Halt!” roared the skipper, menacing the new arrival.

“He sold me out!” snarled the rat-faced young man, pointing toward the hook-nosed person. “That crimp got me to grab his men for him, and then he knocked me out and shipped me aboard too! Lemme at him! I’ll git even with him or my name’s not Paddy Lunt!”

The skipper stretched out his abnormally long arm and slapped him backward across the deck. It was done without effort, apparently.

“I’ll manage this!” bawled the master. “I’ll speak when I want your help! Now—” he turned to the hook-nosed man again—“you think you can play them tricks with Michael McPhee, do you? I’ll teach you, you fat swab! Mister McPherson, trice this swine up to the mainmast by the thumbs!”

A cold chill ran up the spine of Childs and he sprang to his feet just as the skipper happened to bounce into him.

“Out of my way!” roared the autocrat, shoving Childs aside.

“Oh, all right.”

The master halted.

“Say sir when you speak to me!”

“Sir? To you?”

It came out automatically, voicing the scorn of an aristocrat; but when the attorney came to his senses again on the cold deck, with eyes blackened and ears ringing, he realized he had been impolitic.

Roger M. Childs then and there decided on his course. His shrewd brain and trained logic told him that to oppose this blustering, bullying, swaggering skipper was futile physically and idiotic as a simple matter of conduct. Aboard ship a captain is master, court, jury and executioner.

The safety and lives of Childs and all the others lay in the hollows of his hands, subject to any whim he chose to visit upon them. Therefore the attorney decided never to cross this autocrat so long as he was aboard the ship. After that, Childs imagined he would have something to say.

Thus when the attorney looked up to the black-bearded man who had knocked him half across the deck, his face was almost bland, and he nodded. The skipper looked satisfied and turned away, assured that this man was broken.

“I’m boss!” announced the master to all and sundry, hunching his great shoulders and facing the ragged crew truculently. “Any of you who want trouble say so right now!”

There were no candidates.

The skipper gave them plenty of time, then turned to the tall blond person and a darker nondescript.

“Mister McPherson — Mister Olsen — spread all the canvas we got and then pick your watches! Jump lively, you men!”

“SHE’S a ’ell ship!” moaned the little Englishman to Childs when the attorney had staggered into the forecastle a half-hour later with hands blistered and body wrenched by the unaccustomed work.

They were on the off watch and had time to think things over.

“So ’elp me, if I’d known I was bound for the stinkin’ old ’*Industan* I’d ’a’ used some of the boardin’-’ouse gas and woke up ’appy in ’ell!” wailed the Cockney, slumping into a frowsy bunk full of dirty old blankets. “Oh, why does my luck allus pick me for the ’owlin’ old galleys? Sweat and starve—that’s me! Ow, what luck!”

Roger M. Childs, with every fiber aching, was trying to soothe his blistered hands on his shiny old overalls. The skipper and his mates had chevied the attorney from bowsprit to mizzen-truck, cursing him, hitting him and yelling at him till his soul was ragged.

“McPhee seems to be a pretty tough character,” he volunteered.

“McPhee? ’E’s a devil!” spat the little Englishman. “You mark my words, before we makes port there’ll be war! ’E nags at people till they cawn’t endure ’is lip no more, and then some one starts arfter ’im. If it’s me ’e rags, I’m ready! So ’elp me, I don’t care whether I gets shot or not!”

Childs felt uncomfortable and changed the subject.

"Who is the stout party that talked at the captain?" he asked.

"'Im? 'E's 'Slippery Joe' Beadle, the rottenest crimp on the water-front. 'E'd better not sty too near the men, 'e 'adn't! They remembers too much!"

"And McPhee shanghaied him?"

"Pulled 'im in and knocked 'im cold arfter 'e'd delivered the other men aboard. Everybody's shanghaied—even their dory, the *Whitehall*. She's upside down on the poop."

"I see. Retributive justice, you might say."

"Justice, hey?" snarled the voice of Paddy Lunt from the gloom forward. "I'll give him justice, the fat crook! I done his dirty work for months. Then he shipped me out with the rest—knocked me cold, the dirty crimp, like he'd made me do for other people!"

There was an awkward silence in the dim forecastle, broken by the sarcastic voice of Roger M. Childs.

"I see. Did you—er—operate on me?"

The reply was frank and defiant.

"I guess so. You was the gent with the kid gloves, wasn't you? I nipped you right in front of my doorway." There was a deep, dark silence after this and the man hastened to explain himself. "Wot's the use of lyin'?" he snarled. "We're all in the same boat now."

"How about my watch and things?"

"I dunno—Slippery Joe gimme somethin' to drink——"

"I see."

The voice of Childs was so cool and matter of fact that it made the rat-faced rogue nervous. The cold silence was ominous.

"Well, say somethin'!" blurted the little crook, at length. "What are you goin' to do about it?"

"Nothing."

The other gurgled unbelievingly. The attorney, seeking as few enemies as possible, took pains to explain himself.

"They are gone now. As you said, we are all in the same boat. The less trouble we have, the better."

"There'll be trouble, all righto," came the Englishman's mournful voice. "This 'ere *Belle of 'Industan* ain't any good-will-to-men ship, she ain't! Now, if we bands together, mebbe we can tyke the upper 'and in case of trouble. What sye, mates?"

Childs, who had catalogued this small-brained, incompetent, friendly little cockney fairly well, observed that the man seemed frightened enough to try anything. And yet the little Briton, who had lost one ear, the bridge of his nose and part of his accent while knocking about the West Coast, was hardly the type for a leader of conspirators.

He was just a poor little low-caste Englishman whose attitude concerning this ship was ample proof of its character. It was apparently the sort of institution that would make a worm turn.

"Better lay low!" cautioned the attorney. "Wait and go easy!"

"Go easy?" snarled the other. "You don't know what's coming! You 'aven't ate yet! Did you know this 'ere 'ooker bought condemn' Navy biscuit as was rotten a year ago and still 'as to be finished? Do you know McPhee's shot or 'ung a man every voyage? The only wye to beat 'is gyme is to beat it at the start! That's the only wye or my nyme isn't Peter Niddle!"

"PETER NIDDLE!" gasped the attorney. "Niddle?" He was taken aback at this queer finish to his quest. "Why—you're the man I was searching for on the San Francisco water-front!"

"What for?" demanded Peter Niddle, suspiciously.

"You were the nephew of Charles J. Hunt, weren't you?" asked the attorney in a low voice that only carried to Niddle.

"I—I guess so. What of it?"

"Well, he died."

"It's about time. 'E was a sour old dodger. What with 'is dawg and 'is parrot and 'is licker and language I got fed up on 'im years ago, so I went through 'is bloomin' old door for good. Dead, eh? 'E's fifteen years overdue. 'E kept a ship-chandler's shop, 'e did, along the Frisco water-front, but I never went near 'is beery old den because I'd 'ad words with 'im."

"Well, he remembered you in his will."

"'E did? Well, the old pirate! What did 'e leave me?"

Right there Childs regretted his announcement. What he knew of Niddle inclined him to be cautious. By all appearances Niddle, if given too much hope, would probably make an ass of himself immediately.

He might either try to gamble his wealth away, dilate on it to scoffing shipmates, put on insufferable airs or else disbelieve the whole business. The discreet Childs therefore decided to keep the matter in abeyance until he could turn over the inheritance properly.

"I can't tell till we get home and I see the papers," he evaded.

"What's the value of it?" insisted the seaman.

"'I can't tell. There's no need to get excited about it, anyhow."

"Blime!" snorted Niddle. "That's the wye my luck allus breaks!"

The forecastle door opened and several men half-supported Slippery Joe through the door. Breathing in sobs, he was shoved into a bunk, where he slumped into the frowsy blankets and began to groan.

"Serves him right!" shouted Paddy Lunt, who arose from his dark bunk and went over to gloat. "You fat slob, I like to hear you squeal!"

Slippery Joe kept grunting and sobbing. He had been through a terrible ordeal. Paddy Lunt gloated some more while three other wretches shuffled nearer to watch and listen. Childs could only stand it for a short time. He was feeling the first qualms of seasickness and it made him peevish.

"Let him alone!" he demanded. "Can't you see the man's down?"

A growl came from Paddy Lunt, but the attorney found help.

"Let 'im alone!" echoed Peter Niddle. "Let 'im get well and then punch 'is snoot all you like!"

A loud yell arose from the sunny deck outside, a bellow that seemed to shake the planking, followed by the sound of approaching feet. The forecastle door swung open viciously. The bearded skipper rushed in, his face livid with wrath.

"Who left that bucket in the cabin companionway?" he thundered, shaking his fist.

Childs experienced a sinking sensation. While doing menial work aft he had been called away by the silent mate, who needed another hand to hoist certain sails. Given no time to argue, Childs had left the bucket where it was. The skipper's face and clothes were sopping wet.

"Where's the swine that done it?" he bellowed.

There was a deep and awkward silence.

"Well? Well?"

The mate was right behind the skipper and it looked like wholesale retribution. Childs began to fear that the innocent would suffer with the guilty and he considered whether to answer up or not. It looked like inviting a horrible doom. And yet, something in the skipper's demeanor made the attorney wonder if this roaring manhandler were not mostly "front."

He had howled, yelled, threatened, fumed, sworn and bullied from the beginning. It looked overdone—badly overdrawn. It made these poor forecastle hands cower as under a whip-lash, but for Childs it merely furnished food for speculation. He had read about these sea-wolves in books, and a few harrowing water-front tales had trickled into his law office, but Captain Michael McPhee seemed just a bit exaggerated.

"I did it, sir," volunteered Childs.

"You?" The skipper jumped toward the attorney's bunk and glared at him. "Thought you'd play a joke on the cap'n, eh?"

"No, sir; it was there by accident. It was as much an accident as my being on this ship."

"Oh." The skipper assumed a sardonic attitude. "So we've got a limey duke aboard! Well, yer lordship, why did you put that bucket where I'd trip over it?"

The skipper was almost purring and the attorney sensed the thunderclouds, but he held his ground.

"I am not a duke, sir," he replied, coldly. "I am Roger M. Childs, attorney of San Francisco and not without a certain standing. I have been placed on this ship against my will. I have tried to speak to you about it, but you would not hear me.

"I do not presume to threaten you, sir, but I most respectfully urge that you either put me ashore or allow me to pay my passage to the nearest port."

The skipper's bilious face was glowing to purple. He allowed the attorney to finish and when he replied his voice had a peculiar huskiness. He was not used to being bearded in his own forecastle.

"So you'll pay your passage," he remarked, smiling evilly. "All right. Gimme your money!"

"I have none. I was robbed."

"That's what they all say!" The skipper

took a long breath. "You say your name's Childs, hey? Don't lie to me! Your name's John Jones. It's on the ship's papers, signed with a cross! You'll lie to me, will you? You sea lawyer—I'll teach you!"

He smashed out with a big fist that slammed the attorney back into the bunk. He picked him up and hit him again, like a pugilist mauling a dummy. He tossed him back into the bunk and kicked him. He grabbed him by the throat and shook him, then battered at his face again.

"I'll teach you to talk back to me!" he roared to the senseless man in the bunk. "I'll show you swine who's boss here! Mister McPherson—douse this man with a bucket of water! We'll need him for his watch!"

And without further parley the giant turned and swaggered out of the forecastle, his long arms dangling truculently beside him.

THE following days were heartbreaking ordeals for Childs. Aching in every bone, sometimes reeling, he was shoved, hauled and booted from one end of the ship to the other while he tried, in his groping way, to obey orders couched in profane nomenclature that he could not understand. He ran up and down ratlines. He hauled with others on strange ropes, chosen from a maze of cordage that always bewildered him, and found that certain sheets magically appeared, disappeared or swung around to the wind.

He balanced on precarious spars, trembling with fear while the ship lurched and swung. He wore down his blistered hands on pumps, or dodged leaping waters from a jib-boom whose martingale threatened to prong right into the waves as they rushed toward the foaming bows. It was a mad, demoniac week, crammed with incidents that raised welts on his body and scorched his soul.

If he slept, some heavy-booted demon was likely to rout him out with a kick and send him up aloft. When he ate—but this was worst of all. A stomach accustomed to the best in a city noted for its cuisine was suddenly introduced to salt horse, lobscouse, slumgullion and weevil biscuit, and the result was nausea. For three days he ate nothing until raving hunger drove him to it.

Sometimes the friendly, talkative, scatter-brained Peter Niddle quizzed the attorney about the inheritance, but the latter was too weary to offer satisfaction even if he wanted to.

And then they gave him the wheel, as a grudging tribute to his superior intelligence. When they let him alone he was sometimes able to enjoy it, with cool winds fanning his cheek and the old ship rolling through the seas with its canvas taut as a string. When a blow came it was not so pleasant. Cold spray, icy water and sickening lurches made him long to be ashore.

Sometimes the old tub seemed to slant far over and the attorney was stricken with vertigo as the green seas leaped toward him like hissing snakes always trying to strike. To his landlubber eyes the craft was continually defying the laws of gravitation and should have gone over a dozen times.

To the experienced eyes of Skipper McPhee she was simply rolling a bit. McPhee knew the ship better than any one else. Furthermore, he had a record for making time, thus pleasing his owners.

The attorney, from his vantage point on the poop, was able to notice that the rest of the sullen crew received their doses of manhandling as well as he. He realized now that the skipper was not bluffing. McPhee was ready—and supremely willing—to back up his exaggerated attitude at any time.

He ramped, stamped, swore, kicked and struck like a madman while his nervous, irritated crew leaped to do his bidding. When he was not on deck the silent blond mate or the swarthy second mauled the men just the same.

"I'd think McPhee could get work out of the crew without all that," observed Childs to Niddle in the forecastle while the ship was driving into cooler latitudes.

" 'E could but 'e won't," retorted Peter Niddle glumly. " 'E's set on that one idea—beat 'em up before they beats 'im."

"But why? It looks senseless, the way he storms around."

"Mebbe 'e 'as a 'oly 'orror of mutiny," suggested Niddle. " 'E's balmy about it up 'ere." And he tapped his forehead.

"That's possible. It's always fear that makes a bully. Did he ever have a real uprising?"

"Well, they say ten years ago the crew

of the old *Singapore Mandarin* ran 'im off and last 'e saw of 'em they was larfin' at 'im over the bulwarks while 'e pulled for Chile in an open boat. 'E 'ad food and water for ten days and 'e made shore in fifteen. Mebbe 'e suffered too much for 'is own good!"

"Yes," came the insinuating voice of Slippery Joe from another bunk. "But that ain't no reason we should suffer, is it?"

It came from a tentative person who was not even sure of a courteous reply. The fat crimp was now hated worse than ever by the crew, mainly because he was one of two persons whose quarreling had become monotonous.

The eternal scuffles of Slippery Joe and Paddy Lunt were generally staged amid the bunks and interfered with sleep—and after a dose of McPhee and his mates the crew needed rest continually. Slippery Joe's comment, therefore, came in a small voice.

"Well, what can we do?" argued Childs, tiredly.

"Do?" Slippery Joe looked about the dim forecastle with the air of a conspirator. "There's lots of things as might be done by those with the will, mates!"

"What, for instance?"

The attorney observed that Peter Niddle and several others leaned closer to the crimp, who noted it also.

"Many things," said Slippery Joe, cryptically. "There's ways! All it needs is stout hands and stout hearts, mates, and then we'll be the masters." He lowered his voice to a hoarse whisper. "Why not? Can things be worse than they are?"

There was a long, long silence in the forecastle.

"Well?" asked Childs.

"Well. Here we are, friends, caged like rats in a trap. Why not break away? It's easy done if there's brains in it!"

"How?" demanded Childs. "Mutiny? Murder?"

Slippery Joe looked insulted.

"Aw, it ain't that, mates," he protested. "It's jest a getaway in the open boats—all quick and easy-like. The coast is only a little ways east. Why not? It ain't no crime, is it, Mister Lawyer? We didn't come here of our own accords, did we?"

"No; you sent us 'ere!" observed Peter Niddle pointedly.

"I know," sighed Slippery Joe. "That's true. I'll admit it handsome, friends. But if we once git ashore mebbe I can square things. That's what I wants to do—git ashore and square things."

"You?" snarled Paddy Lunt from the darkness forward. "If you ever squared things you'd turn 'em crooked again! You? *Phooie!*"

"Aw, shut up!" enjoined Slippery Joe tiredly. "Don't you think I've got influence, you fellers? Don't you think I could telegraph for money and bring us all back to San Francisco, safe and sound and snug? Why, once we got ashore I could fix it so's every man of you could start out new with money in your pockets!"

THE audience gained new interest, except the attorney, who was unimpressed.

"Yeh; you'd give 'em money, wouldn't you?" snarled Paddy Lunt from up forward. "You'd jest shovel it out, you would!"

Slippery Joe groaned with deep disgust.

"This here is between gen'lemen, you sewer-rat! Shut up!" He turned to the others somewhat defiantly. "Yes, I means that about the money. I done wrong, mates, and I wants to square things, proper and honorable. Once we can git into the boats, friends, all's fine as silk!"

"Well," conceded Peter Niddle, "it's better than bein' on this 'ell ship for the next 'arf year. Look at me arms. Welts!"

"Half year?" questioned Childs, blinking.

"If we're lucky. First we goes to Alarska and then to Bombay, and then Gawd knows where. I 'eard 'em talkin' aft. They 'as 'arf a cargo for Sitka and 'arf for India. They 'ad to tyke what they could bloomin' well get."

"Then perhaps we'll leave at Sitka," suggested Childs.

"Har-har!" snorted Peter Niddle. "D'ye think they collected this 'ere 'uman managerie so's we could kiss 'em good-by first port we made? You'll 'ave a sweet picnic, going ashore at Sitka! We'll stand far offshore and they'll lighter the cargo, with guards on the lighters and the skipper watchin' us like cats. Oh, a daisy plyce to leave!"

"That's it!" chimed in Slippery Joe, persuasively. "It's action right now for us, mates, while we're close to the coast. If you're with me, by this time next week we'll all be happy ashore, snug as a bug in a rug."

Childs had a hazy notion that there was some cold, dreary, inhospitable country between Vancouver and Sitka. He also felt that the escape was not as simple as it looked and that Slippery Joe's persuasiveness masked some ulterior motive.

"How would you get away?" questioned the attorney. "Mutiny?"

"Mutiny? Oh, no, no, no! What's the use of fightin', says I, when we can make away comfy without it? Hey? All we'll do is swing the boats overside and pull for dry land."

"Perhaps the skipper might object," observed Childs, drily.

"Well, suppose she leaks sudden and the officers is all below and busy with cargo?"

"That's the ticket!" flared Peter Niddle, excitedly. "Bore some 'oles in 'er greasy old side. It's easy done!"

"Better let it alone entirely," decided the attorney.

"Wha—what?" screeched Slippery Joe, sitting bolt upright. "You mean you're agin us?"

The crimp acted nervous. He had never understood this man, and the fact that he claimed to be a lawyer made the crew chary of him. Childs had stood rather aloof, nursing his own thoughts. The crimp therefore awaited a declaration of policy, to know just where he stood.

"I mean I will not be with you," announced Childs.

"Why? Don't you want to leave the ship?"

"I certainly do; but I'll not try any scatter-brained plan like yours. When I go ashore I'll do it properly."

"Sure," sneered Slippery Joe, bowing with profane reverence. "You'll walk on the water, I suppose."

"No. But I'll not mutiny nor scuttle the ship!"

The crimp opened his mouth, then shut it. Childs' attitude was not hostile. It was merely a declaration of neutrality.

"Mebbe you'll be tellin' the afterguard about this," hinted the crimp.

"No; but I'm against your plan personally." Childs turned to the rest. "As for you fellows, you'd better think it over before you start anything."

"You're right!" came the voice of Paddy Lunt.

"But 'e 'as a good idea!" protested Peter Niddle. "Me, I'm for it. I'd ruther go through—— than sty 'ere, that's certain. Look at the welts on me back." He started tugging at his shirt for exhibition purposes. "Do we want any more? No, says I!"

A muttered growl came from the rest of the rabble.

Childs grabbed Niddle's shirt and pulled his head close, with the roll of the ship assisting him.

"Stay away from it!" whispered Childs. "That crimp has some ax to grind. Would you trust Slippery Joe, you fool?"

Peter Niddle jerked as if the idea had actually sunk in. The attorney shoved him away. It was not a time for side-whispers.

The voice of Slippery Joe was booming again.

"All we has to do is act like men, mates, and then we'll let his blinkin' nibs navigate his dirty old scow all over the Pacific by his own sweet self. Haw, haw! It'll be the joke of the year, friends!" Then, pointedly, "We'll talk about this matter later on."

THE talk continued in the forecastle for many hours, whenever Childs and Paddy Lunt and Peter Niddle were absent. The attorney, holding aloof, soon realized that a crisis was imminent. He did not know exactly what to do, though he sensed that the plan would probably miscarry.

To his experienced mind, wise to the devious ways of plots and plans ashore, it was not lined up properly. The leadership was questionable, the future was vague after the men left the ship, and the whole thing had all the earmarks of a dangerous fizzle.

On the other hand, Childs could not bring himself to warn the skipper. But between staying with the navigator of a big, dry ship and taking wild chances with Slippery Joe and his slow-witted mob the attorney could only choose the former course, even though it entailed some more of the savage agony he had undergone. The lawyer's cautious, conservative wits had not been impaired by the sea air. If anything they had become more far-seeing.

Further discussion of the great plan in the forecastle, however, was rudely interrupted next evening.

The conspirators were grouped about Slippery Joe's bunk except for Peter Niddle, who was sleeping, and Childs, who was on deck trying to get some enjoyment from a glorious sunset. The skipper and his two mates suddenly emerged from the cabin aft, tramped along the deck as if on urgent business and slammed into the forecastle like thunderbolts.

A bellow, a crash and a series of loud howls came through the forecastle door and then bedlam was turned loose. A screaming Finn emerged, holding his right arm limply. An Italian and a Portuguese next hurtled out of the forecastle, propelled by the boots of the swarthy second mate. Two more bounced forth noisily and ran toward the mainmast.

And then Slippery Joe was rushed out, with the captain and the silent blond mate kicking him along the deck as if he were a football. In the skipper's right hand were a knife, a revolver and a pair of brass knuckles.

"You'll mutiny, will you?" thundered the captain to Slippery Joe between mighty kicks. "You'll steal my pistol, will you? You'll kill me when I'm not lookin' and then git the crew into the boats, will you? I'll teach you, you swine!"

He propelled the wobbling crimp past the mainmast with a mighty kick and sprang toward him again, fearing lest he lose the opportunity of ano her kick.

"I'll keep you out of mischief! I'll fix you up, you fine mutineer! You'll go about in irons after this! Hear me? Irons!"

And he booted the dazed conspirator aft and closed the cabin door, leaving behind the echo of that thundering word, "Irons!"

"Good work!" came a satisfied voice alongside Childs. "He'll not play any more tricks on me, he won't!"

Childs wheeled toward the speaker. It was Paddy Lunt.

"Oh." In a flash the attorney saw how things stood. "So Slippery Joe had a pistol and was planning murder before he took the men into the boats. Murder. He'd have had the entire crew almost equally guilty before the law, too. I see. You told the officers about Slippery Joe's plans? I see. You were the informer. And yet that puts you in a bad position in the forecastle. Maybe the men will try to make things hot for you!"

"I don't care," returned Paddy Lunt with new jauntiness. "I'm out of there! The skipper's gotta protect me now, so I'll bunk aft and eat with the mates. Sody biscuits with honey, good corn beef, fresh spuds, new can' corn and prime bacon—M-m! Well, so long—I've gotta look over the plush fittin's in me new parlor!"

And the little rat-faced Judas, unpunished, immune and thoroughly happy at his revenge, turned away and made aft into the comfortable precincts reserved for the officers.

Roger M. Childs leaned against the bulwark and swore. The world seemed out of kilter and off color, and his faith in ultimate justice wavered. Must he stay imprisoned in this most depressing ship for months? Must his carefully built law business go to pot while he slopped eternally about the deck of a smelly, noisy, lurching old Jezebel of a vessel and obeyed the orders of riffraff officers? It didn't seem as if he could stand it much longer.

And if in some wild hurricane the ship were torn apart by strange Asiatic seas could he hope to escape the inconsiderate fate of a forecastle hand? Childs found himself prey to dark thoughts that would not down, made worse by chill winds that swept over the bulwarks from a darkening western sky.

A roaring voice shook the attorney out of his trance, and he turned to behold the black-bearded skipper bearing down on him. The master's face looked puzzled and suspicious.

"Well?" he snarled. "Why didn't you join in this here mutiny? Hey? What's your idea?"

"I didn't think it would work, sir."

The skipper looked astonished, then warlike.

"Oho! I see! If you thought it'd work you'd help kill the old man too! Oho! So it looked too dangerous for yer lordship!"

"Quite so."

The skipper showed his teeth angrily.

"Well, then I'll see that it stays dangerous!"

And he turned away.

"Why?" asked the attorney to himself as he stared at the master's broad back. What was the skipper sounding him for? Was the bearded man growing uncertain and wondering who to count on? Had the Slippery Joe episode shaken his nerve?

PETER NIDDLE furnished part of the answer next afternoon when the attorney happened to catch him smuggling a large carpenter's auger under the stained mattress of his bunk.

"What's that for?" whispered the attorney.

"Shut up!" growled the little seaman hoarsely. "This 'ere's a wepping of war!"

"It will be if the skipper sees it. What's it for?"

"For?" The little Cockney straightened to all his five-feet-three. "I'm going to get off this floatin' 'ell if I 'ave to bore 'oles all over 'er rotten 'ull! Listen. Everything was all right with Slippery Joe's ideas except Slippery Joe, wasn't it? Well? Cawn't I put it through? Look—there's Gonzales with 'is arm smashed, Finkman with one of 'is ribs stove in, 'Dago Tony' all smashed and bleedin'. And three others. Who did it? Don't you think we know? Don't you think we'll tyke any odds to get out from under?"

"But——"

"Listen. 'Ave you lived my life? 'Ave you? Was you put aboard a floatin' coffin at eighteen and kept on 'ell ships by bad luck ever since? Was you? You say you was a loryer. All right.

"Do they kick loryers all over the world and treat 'em like dorgs? Do they give loryers the leavings of garbage cans to live on, like they does to sailormen 'ere in the year of our Lord 1892? Do they knock loryers cold all the time and rob 'em and ship 'em aboard like sardines in a box? Don't talk to me, Mister Loryer; I've 'ad enough! I don't care if they kills me—I've 'ad enough!"

The pitiable outburst of this poor little cockney made Childs warm to him, even though his aspiring to leadership was grotesque. The attorney's sane mind bade him hold this bantam down. Childs was not inviting catastrophes. If he did triumph in the end he planned a real triumph, not a fizzle.

"You're right," admitted Childs. "And yet—after the Slippery Joe matter they'll be keeping a sharp watch on the fo'c'stle. Better put that gimlet away. No use to be caught before you're ready."

The cockney assumed a shrewd and knowing expression.

"Little chawnce! They'll not go arfter me. They think I'm a bloomin' saint—the kind that turns 'is other cheeks. Peter Niddle'll never fight back! Oh, no! 'E's a pure and 'igh minded sailorman beamin' with gratitood for the officers! Smash 'is nose in, Mister Mate! 'E likes it, 'e does. 'E wants more!"

"Where did you get that idea?"

"Listen. I wasn't in with Slippery Joe, was I? Didn't Paddy Lunt tell who was who when 'e peached? The skipper knows I was out of it. 'E counts on me and the two mates and the cook and the old carpenter and Paddy Lunt and mebbe you, in case of trouble. Well? Cawn't you see I can lead the men now—perwided you won't? 'Aven't I the best chawnce?"

The attorney observed that the officers were playing a canny game. He also saw there was some truth in Peter Niddle's arguments. But to allow this little chatterbox to proceed with his suicidal plans was ridiculous.

"That's all true," Childs conceded. "Only you'd better put that gimlet away. Can't you see it isn't time yet? Here's a lot of sick and battered men in the fo'c'stle. Would they be any good in an open boat? Why not let them get well?"

"Yes. That's true. I 'adn't thought of that. But this 'ere 'as to be done while we're off the coast, or it's too late."

"Yes; but we'll be off the coast quite a while."

Childs finally induced Peter Niddle to get rid of his auger but it was like persuading a little boy to burn a new toy drum. In the next two days nothing happened. The crew went about its work sullenly, the skipper and his mates battered them about as usual, Slippery Joe clanked around the afterdeck with an ancient ball-and-chain apparatus hitched to his right foot, and the old ship, favored by chill winds, romped along and threw a foaming white trail behind her.

THERE was a calm-before-the-storm feeling aboard. The men when taking orders showed steely glitters in their eyes, though they sprang to obey. The nervous, irritable officers smashed right and left.

One man, a Swede, lunged at the silent mate. A revolver-butt felled him and he was hauled into the forecastle, leaving red spots along the deck as he went, while the men of the watch looked on and glanced at each other covertly.

"It'll be over soon," announced Peter Niddle two evenings later when he and Childs were lounging in their bunks and trying to eat a dark and gruesome stew in pannikins in their laps. "Look at this stuff—smell it—*wuff!*"

"What's up?" inquired Childs.

Peter Niddle leaned closer.

"We 'ave a better plan," he confided. "Listen. We cawn't tyke these 'ere cripples in open boats, can we? All right. We'll leave 'em aboard ship as passengers. Listen. What's the matter with tyking the blarsted ship 'erself? Eh?"

"What? What? Good glory—nonsense!"

"It's not nonsense. Listen. At midnight the second mate's on watch up above'ere lookin' over the gear. The skipper and McPherson's asleep. All we 'as to do is jump the man above us tomorrow night when it's dark, grab 'is gun and go aft and wrap the skipper and mate in cordage. It's easy! Then we'll swing 'er for the coast and wave our jolly adoos to 'er when she's near shore. See?"

"Great Scott! How many men are in this?"

"Only a few—yet."

"Suppose you pile her on the rocks?"

"Little dynger—but what do we care, if we 'as to?"

"Have you thought of the consequences?"

"Conserkenses!" Peter Niddle snorted. "And 'e arsks me that! Are you built of wood? Conserkenses! Are there no conserkenses for them that drives us to this?" Peter Niddle hunched up close to the attorney and looked at him suspiciously. "Say—you've been 'olding away from us fellers. Is it a gyme you're plying? Are you with us or against us? Or just plain yellow?"

"I am playing a game," retorted Childs coldly.

"Yes? As 'ow?"

"By keeping still. I'm playing a game under the most dependable set of rules in the world."

"As 'ow?"

"The law."

"Oh, ——!"

"All right. Only, I think you're foolish. You're trying to make an outlaw of yourself. I'm trying to make an outlaw of McPhee and all his accomplices."

"It sounds good. Go on. 'Ow?"

"I don't know yet. It depends."

The attorney's caution had warned him against telling Peter Niddle even this much. Niddle would probably talk. Slippery Joe or Paddy Lunt, for example, would probably hear and might be willing to relate things to the skipper and thus curry favor. The manhandling captain would thus know that Childs was laying for him more shrewdly than any of the others, and the skipper might take offensive steps beforehand.

The master's position was fairly secure before the courts no matter what happened. He could protest innocence. He could say he did not know this man was Roger M. Childs and get away with it. Thinking these things, the attorney kept silent.

"It depends!" sneered Peter Niddle. "Is that all you can sye? You that's been battered and banged—look at your swelled jaw! It depends, says you!"

"It's only a matter of time," returned Childs calmly. "Things will come out all right."

Peter Niddle wondered if this strange, aloof man might not have something up his sleeve after all.

"But what can I do?" snarled Niddle irritably. "The men are not bloomin' hopticians like you. The men's worked up desp'rate. It's only a matter of hours till they goes rampin' mad!"

"Niddle," said Childs seriously, "do you think you could stop this wild idea from growing if you really wanted to?"

Niddle looked perplexed and irritated.

"I dunno. Mebbe. Mebbe not. Why?"

Childs felt that now he had to give over some carefully censored information to stop this fool seaman from abetting trouble.

"Peter Niddle," he announced, "I have every reason to believe you own this ship!"

"WHAT?" gasped the astonished sailorman, drawing away.

"Exactly."

"You—you 'aven't slept werry well lytely," conceded the Cockney, "and what with the bangin' you got——"

"I mean it," insisted Childs. "I was made the attorney for the estate of your late uncle, Charles J. Hunt——"

"That's so."

"And Charles J. Hunt happened to hold

a mortgage on a ship called the *Belle of Hindustan*, which he foreclosed just before his death. His will left this property to Peter Niddle, a nephew."

A weird light was shining in the small blue eyes of Niddle.

" 'Eavens!" he breathed. "Me!" He drew a long breath. "First thing I'll do is fire the skipper and mates. No, I'll order decent perwisions from the cabin. I'd best tell the men about it now."

"Whoa!" exclaimed Childs. "The ship's not yours yet. You have no standing until you take legal possession."

" ——!" Peter Niddle quit jiggling in the bunk. "I'll tell the crew, anyway. Them that's treated me right gets treated right. Why didn't you tell me about this before?"

"Because I knew you'd make an ass of yourself. Yes, you're headed that way already. Do you think the men will believe you easily? What would the officers say when the talk trickled aft? You'd probably be beaten worse than you are. Also laughed at. Better keep your mouth shut. If you can't, I'll try a little assault and battery myself!"

"Then why did you tell me? Just to see me mouth water?"

"No. I had to make you stop this insurrection you've started. I want you to stand for law and order, to keep the ship safe till it can be turned over properly."

"Well. Doesn't the skipper know who 'is owner is?"

"He knows the ship belongs to an heir of some new buyer, whoever that may be. You can go aft and announce yourself—if you want."

Peter Niddle gasped helplessly.

"And I cawn't move 'and nor foot!" he moaned. "I darsn't sye a word on me own ship! I'm tied—tied!"

"Think how it's been with me!" sighed Childs. "I told the old owners to operate her for a percentage of the receipts till the heir could be found. I had other business to attend to— Great Scott!"

A sound like a muffled shot came from aft into the forecastle. The men looked at each other. A moment later another shot came, followed by a yell.

"What's up?" exclaimed Childs, breaking for the entrance.

He halted beyond the doorway and peered along the shadowed deck, where the last faint tinge of daylight colored the gray planking. A man—it looked like the second mate—was running for the cabin door. Above the poop the helmsman had left his wheel and was looking down the cabin companionway. And that was all to be seen.

"Something's 'appened," observed Niddle, crowding up.

The cabin door aft opened, throwing a streak of light along the deck. The mate went in. The door closed. There was a sudden yell and then a third shot, followed by a muffled thud and another explosion.

"It's murder, back there!" quavered Peter Niddle in an awed voice. "Mebbe Slippery Joe's swiped a gun arfter all! I was a prophet! So 'elp me, this 'ere ship's a 'oodoo!"

And he looked over his shoulder, seeking ghosts.

Childs was crowded aside by a mob that shoved him from behind and then stood irresolute, their eyes all fixed straight aft toward that grim and silent cabin.

The door opened. The square of light illumined the deck again and in the midst of the glare stood Slippery Joe with his chains unlocked, like a sinister idol in a hazy yellow aureole. In his right hand was a smoking pistol with the blue muzzle pointed downward. He stared toward the forecastle as if defiant of the others and uncertain of himself, while the audience stood spellbound.

The helmsman had recovered the wheel and was swinging the ship back on her course. The timbers and cordage groaned, making eerie noises. A squall struck the sails and made the deck heel over a bit. Bracing himself, Childs shook away his momentary paralysis and started aft toward the silent figure.

"What have you done?" asked the attorney in a strange voice.

The other seemed to find tongue all at once, with the words tumbling over each other.

"It was self-defense—self-defense!" he quavered. "I had to. McPhee hit me—the gun went off. After that—the mates came."

The speaker licked his lips.

Childs looked at the pistol barrel and then at Slippery Joe's cold little eyes, now twitching with the look of a cornered rat. The attorney took a chance. He felt that some one must take charge of things and he was the most competent. Right there he assumed authority.

"Self-defense against the master of a ship is mutiny!" he ruled. "Stand aside and let me go in."

Slippery Joe hunched his fat shoulders aggressively and blocked the way, swinging the pistol muzzle upward a little.

"I'll take no orders from you!" snarled the desperate man. "You can't talk that way to me! Do I have to stand off you and all the rest?"

Childs put up propitiating hands.

"Nobody's going to harm you," he announced in a low voice. "Better drop that gun and see what you're going to do about it. Let us go in."

Perhaps wanting to think it over, the crimp decided to step out of the way and made for the port bulwark, where he communed with himself, a lonely figure against the darkening sky. Childs, shoved from behind, stumbled into the cabin, where the hanging lamp over the table threw light upon the work of Slippery Joe.

THE legs and sea-boots of the tall blond mate lay sprawled on the board floor near the entrance, with his head and shoulders in shadow under the table. Between the table and the old black cabin hair sofa lay the second mate, curled as grotesquely, his head resting on an ancient rag carpet that was reddening fast.

Beside him was an overturned chair and beyond the chair lay the captain, breathing hard and twitching, with the front of his dingy vest splashing with a vivid color. His was the only sound in the cabin. The swaying of the ship was the only motion. The men, on tiptoe, were holding their breaths.

"Shot!" gulped Peter Niddle. "And they was kickin' us an hour ago!"

A ribald voice arose from behind the half-opened door of the little galley beyond the whitewashed cabin. Its cocky, sarcastic note jangled like a piano out of tune.

"Sure they was shot. Murdered! And we know who done it, boys!"

Childs lifted his gaze.

"Shut up, Lunt," he advised coldly.

Quick footsteps came from outside and the sinister hook-nosed man stood at the doorway, breathing hard, with the pistol ready in his hand. His glance went about the cabin, seeking the owner of the voice.

"I'm in for it now," announced Slippery Joe. "I might as well make it four!"

Childs jumped forward. "No!" he cried. "Man—drop that gun! Things are bad enough as they are!"

Childs realized that Slippery Joe was desperate enough to do anything, and he sought an expedient.

"The men are not against you now," he urged. "They were about to start something anyhow. If you make them afraid of you, you'll lose out. Then where will you be?"

"The men!" snorted the fat crimp. "What do I care for them? Those mackerel? I sold 'em by the carload!" He snapped his fingers. "Now I'm on top, mebbe I'll stay boss!"

Childs changed his tactics.

"All right; be boss," he returned. "Then what? Would you like to bring the ship into port as things stand? Could you face a court?" Slippery Joe's fingers involuntarily went to his own throat, but the attorney was adamant. "There's sixteen witnesses to this, not including the cook and carpenter. Do you think a court couldn't turn them inside out and get at the truth? Or would you prefer to kill off the whole sixteen and work the ship yourself? Would you——"

"Enough!" pleaded Slippery Joe. "Enough!" His baffled eyes looked bewildered, glancing sidewise nervously. "What shall I do?" he inquired, like a child dazed at his own wrongdoing.

"Swing the ship toward the coast and we'll all skip!" thundered a big voice from the crowd.

"No!" yelled Peter Niddle. "The ship's too vallyable!"

"What do we care?" bawled another seaman. "It's not our ship!"

A light of hope gleamed in Slippery Joe's pig eyes.

"That's right," he rumbled. "Run her ashore and then we takes our chances. It's better'n goin' to jail till the courts git through with us, boys! You know what they does to sailormen!"

It hit the men in the midriff. Public opinion, influenced by the sailor's innate fear of the law, leaped toward Slippery Joe, and Childs felt helpless. The crimp was now ingratiating himself with the men he had just publicly scorned, and they were falling for it. Childs wondered how humans could be so witless.

"There's no need for honest men to be afraid of the law!" shouted Childs, to regain his ground. "And as for Joe—Joe, why not take a dory and go ashore yourself? That leaves the crew clear of it. Then they can bring the ship into port and get their pay. Isn't that the best plan?"

At the word "pay," public opinion veered around instantly.

"That's right," agreed the big voice in the crowd. "We ain't done nothin'. A little money won't hurt us."

"Aw, swing 'er to the coast," growled Slippery Joe, now decided on his course. "What do we care for money? I can give you fellers all you wants, anyhow. Has this ship been so all-fired happy that you wants to parade your blinkin' faces before a court jest out of gratitood?"

"Me, I stys by the ship!" piped up Peter Niddle. "I stys aboard 'er if I 'as to bring 'er in myself!"

Slippery Joe turned irritably.

"What for?" he snapped. "To testify against me if I'm caught?"

Childs saw that the crimp was shrewder than he thought. Slippery Joe did not want to go ashore alone!

"I stys by the ship!" reiterated Peter Niddle.

Childs, trained to politics, saw that some of the men were willing to follow Niddle's lead. Others looked toward Slippery Joe, their heavy faces expressing wonderment and a possible hope. Paddy Lunt stayed silent behind the galley door. He was the unknown equation.

"Let be!" demanded Childs, playing for time. "We've got to stay aboard for a while anyhow. Let's look at the skipper. We've forgotten him. Hm. He's pretty badly hit. Niddle, grab his feet while I take his shoulder. Bring him into his bunk."

"Aw, let him lie!" growled Slippery Joe.

Childs straightened and looked at the crimp eye to eye. The hook-nosed criminal had the pistol in his hand and yet the attorney realized he must accept this man's enmity right there if necessary. Childs had to become the boss or Slippery Joe would. There as no alternative.

"Joe," said the attorney, coldly, "wouldn't it be better under the circumstances if you kept out of this? You shot this man in hot blood. Would you finish him in cold blood?"

Childs turned to the crew.

"This skipper's been a pretty rough citizen. We all know that. But now he's a wounded man—perhaps dying. If there's any one here who'd refuse help to a dying man I want him to step forward. I want the crew to look at him."

It was a crusher. It made the men think and it sent Slippery Joe out of the cabin door, muttering. Two of the men crossed themselves nimbly. The rest gurgled in protest.

Childs bent over the prostrate captain and noticed that his eyes were open, looking at the attorney with astonishment. He started to speak but gave it up, so Childs and Niddle lifted the man into his bunk just off the little cabin saloon while the rest of the crew tendered rough assistance.

Then began a course in rough surgery—merely the binding and cleaning of a red wound under the left lung and passing out at the side of the back. No one knew the first elements of surgery except the attorney, who had stumbled across it in law cases and then promptly forgotten it.

The condition of the skipper could only be guessed at. He was half awake and swearing softly, but that was the only information obtainable. The attorney made him as comfortable as possible, left him under the care of a Pole, and then headed the assemblage toward the deck.

"Whatever you does, I'm with you," whispered Peter Niddle as they went out. "Will you sty by the ship?"

"Certainly. Right to the nearest port."

"Righto. There's six others will do the syme. What becomes of Slippery Joe? Do we 'and 'im over to the courts ashore?"

"I don't know. As a matter of duty we ought to, but if he thought we intended to do that he'd run amuck. If I could only put him ashore with provisions! But he'll not do that. He wants to take the crew with him, on the principle that misery loves company. Then if he's ever brought to court he'll bewilder those poor lunkheads of sailormen so badly that he'll probably fasten the shooting on them and turn State's evidence!"

Peter Niddle scratched his head.

"And I'm the owner of this 'ere carousal!" he bleated. " 'Ow is it all coming out?

Where are we 'eading for? What are you going to do right now?"

Roger M. Childs showed a genuine smile for the first time during the voyage.

"I'm going to make that cook dish up a real square meal or die!"

THE next day was a remarkable one for a big ship at sea. Had it been at a later date it might have been termed a Bolshevik carnival. At numerous discussions and palavers the fate of the ship was tossed about like a football. Committees met fore and aft and argued about nothing in particular, with not a real idea in the lot. Conferences were held in the cabin, in the forecastle, at the masts, at the wheel and even out on the spars, wherever two men met.

Slippery Joe had a real following. Peter Niddle also had a constituency. Childs was able to sway some of both factions, but others held off, some because Childs professed to be a lawyer and some deciding now to resent orders from any man under any circumstance.

Childs next found himself acquiring an official guard, one Mulcahy, a black-browed, slow-witted, big-footed hulk who belied his race's reputation for mental nimbleness. At times Childs had given him a pitying friendliness. Now the attorney took pains to link this sullen man to him. Mulcahy began to follow him around like a dog.

It was about time for such steps. Though Childs was tanned by the sea air and his muscles were becoming more pliable, he knew that in a brawl he would probably be worsted, and he could not afford to be beaten. As he studied the stubborn unintelligence of the crew he realized more and more that if he could not bring this voyage to a decent ending nobody could. Slippery Joe was the only other man with brains on the ship.

Paddy Lunt was another element that made Childs thoughtful. Cautious of Slippery Joe's pistol, detested by the men because he betrayed them, and with the support of the skipper and mates now gone, Paddy Lunt flitted about like a ghost, seen and yet unseen. Childs hoped he could remain out of sight till the end of the voyage. Otherwise there might be another murder. Slippery Joe had mentioned Paddy Lunt several times.

After a brief funeral for the two mates Childs decided to look into the business of navigation. Not a man aboard knew the first rudiments. After an hour in the cabin amid cryptically marked charts and strange instruments and a dog-eared copy of Bowditch, Childs began to scratch his head.

"As near as I can make out," he remarked to his shadow, Mulcahy, "we're on board a ship in the Pacific Ocean and the ship has three masts and is pointing northward somewhere."

"Yes," grunted Mulcahy with conviction. "That's right."

Childs fiddled around a chart some more, taking note of certain penciled marks and comparing them with observations from the log. Finally reaching an estimate, the attorney added seventy miles for progress since the skipper was shot. The total he announced to Peter Niddle, who was also in the cabin.

"We're about fifty-five-something north and one-thirty-seven-something west. Now, if we can only speak a ship, maybe our troubles will be over. We'll keep heading north. Then all we have to do is fool around till something comes along."

"I 'adn't thought of that," complimented Peter Niddle. "I've done some things, though. See?" And he triumphantly produced two heavy pistols. "They belonged to the mates," he explained. "The other men, they looked for 'em, but I had 'em."

Childs nodded, thankful that the weapons were in no worse hands, and let him go. The attorney was thinking of his charts right then, otherwise he might have paid more attention to Niddle. Next day he learned his mistake.

"Slippery Joe, 'e's gathering 'is crowd!" announced Peter Niddle, breaking into the cabin where Childs was poring over the charts again.

"He always is," returned Childs. "They were murmuring in the forecastle all night."

The attorney had kept his bunk forward, not wanting to set himself apart from the men. He did not seek unnecessary discussion about his self-elevation from any quarter.

"But Slippery Joe's desp'rate!" urged Peter Niddle. "The more 'e thinks about things the more 'e gets worked up. Mebbe 'e's ready to become a silly old Napoleum, with campaigns and things."

"What?"

"Well. 'E was whispering about selling the cargo, or stealing the small change from the cabin locker, or taking the whole ship. 'E's in for it now, thinks 'e, and 'e might as well go the limit. 'E cawn't wait. Listen. If you 'ails a ship and gets taken to port, where does Slippery Joe come in? Mebbe on the yard-arm of a gallows! Do you think 'e's going to sty aboard for that? Why, 'e turned white the instant 'e 'eard you was going to do it!"

"The instant he heard about it! Great Scott! Of all the talkative, irresponsible idiots, you're the prize! Why, confound it, I wasn't trying to put his neck in jeopardy. I wasn't thinking of him. I was only scheming to make port. And now look at the mess!"

"But—but I only wanted to spread the good news and make every one 'appy!" explained Niddle piteously. "Then Slippery Joe, 'e says you're trying to get the men into trouble."

"How?" snapped Childs.

"Well, by posing as a blinkin' 'ero fighting against mutiny and all that, so's you'd get all the credick and all the money ashore. Then, says Slippery Joe, you'll give the crew the ha-ha and they'll all be on the beach."

"Hm. A little far-fetched but still logical enough for some people. Did you say anything?"

"Me? Oh, I stood by you, all righto. I told the men you couldn't do such a thing if you wanted."

"No? Go on. This is going to be good! What next?"

"Why, I said I owned the ship and I'd see that every man was paid proper, if I had to sell 'er."

"Great glory! I knew it! Were there any remarks?"

Peter Niddle's face wrinkled with unpleasant thoughts.

"They larfed. All except Slippery Joe."

"Go on."

" 'E said 'e was glad to meet the man that owned this ship, because if ever a man deserved a kicking 'e did. So the crew, they kicked, werry merry-like."

Childs saw that the Niddle faction had vanished in laughter. Slippery Joe was now dominant except for Childs' personal friends, and Slippery Joe's time to strike had come.

"Are those pistols still with you?" asked the attorney, rising from his charts.

"Oh, they's no chawnce of them leaving me. By the wye, 'ow's the skipper?"

"Asleep. I was just looking at him. For all I know, he's about gone. I gave him No. 2, No. 5 and No. 6, in the medicine locker, as prescribed for wounds and shock. That was all I could do."

CHILDS, the navigator, rolled up a chart with a wide circle penciled on it, denoting that the vessel was somewhere within that circle.

"Come on up," he invited. "We ought to bring the ship a few points more to the east."

And he led the way up the cabin companionway to where Mulcahy was smoking by the wheel.

Giving his instructions, Childs glanced beyond the mainmast to where figures were grouped near the forecastle door holding conversations or pointing fingers aft. Then Slippery Joe came forth.

He did not hold a pistol in his hand, but his attitude was cocky and aggressive. He strode right up to the break of the poop and halted, looking upward, while the men shambled around him or blocked the port and starboard steps. Childs found himself in exactly the position of Skipper McPhee when the master stood by the rail and looked down upon this motley crew for the first time.

"Well?" asked the attorney curtly.

"What course are you sailin'?" demanded Slippery Joe with equal terseness.

"Approximately north-northeast."

"Who told you to?"

"I told myself."

"Oh. Are you the boss?"

"No. Are you?"

"The crew has voted. There was nubuddy official in charge, so the crew took action, proper and legal. I'm in command of the ship."

"How did you happen to be picked?"

"By the vote of the crew."

"I see. You sneaked an election over. Well, it's illegal."

There was a dangerous light in Slippery Joe's eyes.

"Yes? How?"

"Because the crew was not all notified. I wasn't. Peter Niddle wasn't. Mulcahy wasn't. That made it a crooked election."

The crew saw the point and began to

stir. Slippery Joe, now wrathful, stopped it instantly.

"All right," he invited. "Do you want another vote right here?"

"Oh, no; let's keep your election illegal."

It was a poser. There was an awkward silence. Childs said nothing further, nor did he make the slightest effort to descend from the poop. Slippery Joe did not feel like starting up the steps yet, for Childs' indifferent, non-resisting attitude gave the crimp no opening. It baffled him, so the crimp made it up in talk.

"I'm sorry about you, Childs," he reproached. "This here crew's treated you like a gen'leman and yet you stands there now like you owned the ship. I suppose you thinks you're too high-and-mighty to mingle with ordinary folks like us, Childs, but us men is human bein's, Childs, and we've got just as much rights as you have. You can't hold off the whole crew. Better be friendly-like, Childs, so we can all be pals together, snug as a bug in a rug. Come on, Childs, don't let's have no trouble. Come on down."

Roger M. Childs, attorney at law, clubman and after-dinner speaker, knew that he now had to make the talk of his life. He had his back to the wall. And yet, though his rags, unkempt hair and frowsy beard made him akin to the worst scarecrow in the lot, something in his imperious gesture overawed them.

"Be still!" he commanded haughtily. "Look here, you men—do you suppose I'm going to let Slippery Joe run things? Slippery Joe! Doesn't the name warn you, you fools? Whose fault is it you're here—yours or Slippery Joe's? Who shot the skipper and mates—you or Slippery Joe? Whose hide is this crimp working for—yours or Slippery Joe's? And if a hanging is to come——"

"That's enough from you!" shrieked the crimp. "We'll settle your hash right now!"

With a leap Slippery Joe went up the port steps, tugging the pistol from his pocket. Peter Niddle jumped behind the boat lying upside down on the poop and produced his weapons. Two men started up the starboard steps. Mulcahy dropped the wheel and rushed to meet them.

But out of the corner of his eye the attorney had time to notice that the rest of Slippery Joe's crowd was disintegrating. Childs' words had scattered the faction and made the men think. There was only the crimp and two others to fight.

Slippery Joe bounded to the poop, swinging the pistol muzzle toward Childs, who stood with empty hands and awaited him. A shot exploded behind Childs. Slippery Joe turned and saw Peter Niddle, half-concealed behind the boat and aiming for another shot. The crimp realized he was in the open, with his enemy well under cover. That was enough for Slippery Joe. With a yell he turned, took a snap shot toward Childs and jumped down the steps again.

Meantime Mulcahy had met the crimp's two friends at the other landing. The big Irishman, running from the wheel, shouldered the first arrival with an impetus that sent him flying backward.

The second man came on. Mulcahy swung a mighty blow that missed his jaw. The man bent and tackled Mulcahy's thighs, and they squirmed and wrestled down the steps together. Childs jumped to help the Irishman but noticed that the action was suddenly halted. The contestants and the crew had stopped their clatter and were looking past Childs' shoulder as though seeing a ghost. Childs turned.

Beside him, standing with clenched fists and a sardonic smile, was the master of the ship.

THE man was weak and pale, with the black beard making his face look stark white; but his eyes had the same old dominating expression and his mouth was set in its old firm line, compressed by pain. Childs did not know what to say. Neither did Peter Niddle. Neither did the crew. Slippery Joe was out of sight, under the steps below.

"Well?" exclaimed the skipper, limping toward the rail and bracing himself. "What's all this noise?" he demanded, with an echo of his old roar. "Where's this man Slippery Joe?"

There was no answer. The skipper, puzzled, turned about and saw Peter Niddle.

"Give me those pistols!" demanded the master.

"No!" protested Peter Niddle, backing away.

"What? What?"

"Give them over, Niddle," advised Childs.

"But——"

"Obey the captain's orders!" bawled the attorney.

Niddle, looking at Childs as if he had turned traitor, came forward gingerly and the skipper grabbed the weapons out of his hands and turned to the edge of the poop.

"Now, where's Slippery Joe, you men?" he bellowed huskily.

Nobody replied but glances went toward the foot of the steps.

"Oho!" said the skipper, peering down and making ready with the pistol in his right hand.

A flash of flame flew upward. The sudden wind of the explosion ruffled the captain's black hair. The crimp, feeling he would probably be hung anyhow, had declared war. The skipper jumped backward, then straightened up, and some last reserve of vitality surged through him.

"Oho! Well, we'll fix that!" he exclaimed, keeping back from the rail cannily and stretching a cautious arm forward. "There's ways to smoke him out!"

The skipper's long arm went past the break of the poop. He swung the pistol barrel straight downward. His fingers twitched. An explosion jarred from his hand, while the scared crew jumped for shelter. The skipper fired again diagonally to another point beneath him. And again. And three times more, while gusts of flame ripped upward in reply. The front of the poop was hazy with acrid smoke.

Then the skipper switched the other weapon to his right hand and resumed firing. He was literally spraying bullets downward along the cabin wall.

He fired again. It was more than the victim could stand. There was a yell from below and the figure of Slippery Joe darted from shelter and ran forward like a jackrabbit, taking zigzag jumps. The skipper half-leaped, half-fell to the rolling deck with Childs and Peter Niddle after him. Mulcahy grabbed the wheel again to steady the ship.

Slippery Joe reached the forecastle ladder. Another figure streaked out of the cabin door right after him, holding a butcher-knife and yelling triumphant curses. He got into the skipper's line of fire. Slippery Joe, glancing back, noticed. He smiled sardonically despite the perspiration on his fat face. His hand swung around. His pistol belched flame again.

Paddy Lunt turned with a look of utter amazement and crumpled to the deck, holding his right thigh and squirming.

Slippery Joe jumped up the steps. The skipper was almost upon him and fired again. He missed. The crimp dodged around the mainmast and made for the bow. He leaped across chains and gear. Then, at the bowsprit, he turned in desperation. He was cornered. He had only one weapon—the empty pistol. Reversing that, he hurled it with all his might. The skipper ducked and fired.

"I've got you now!" roared the master. "I'll teach you!"

The skipper charged forward, even though he was half reeling. Slippery Joe bent low and swung under the bowsprit. His body disappeared, then his head. The skipper rushed to the bow and peered over. His arm with the pistol went forward and downward, as a silent threat. He stood that way for a full fifteen seconds. There was no shot.

Finally the master straightened up. He turned away from the bow wearily. Childs went past him and looked downward. There was nothing there except the waters that slapped toward the bows.

"What—where?" asked the attorney, dumfounded.

The master limped to port, then to starboard, looking over the bulwarks. There was nothing to be seen but white-capped waves that stretched clear to the horizon.

"It's over," hiccuped the skipper, reeling suddenly. "He went under the ship. Help me aft, Niddle. Come, git a move on!"

Childs helped support him to the deck, but there the attorney stopped. Paddy Lunt was groaning to a crowd trying to assist him to his feet. The rat-faced little crook's eyes still had that look of surprize.

"He only fired five shots when I jumped him!" moaned Paddy Lunt. "I thought he'd fired all six!"

SITKA harbor. Alongside the ship floated two big lighters, with a derrick-boat to transfer cargo. Shoreward, timbered mountains loomed over a settlement of wooden houses, with the old fort and the quaint Russian church spire standing out over the roofs of the village.

Anchored at some distance from McPhee's ship were two schooners, a brig, four dirty old whalers, and a heavy-timbered black ship with three masts and a stack. Although she had the general appearance of a whaler, with boats swung from big wooden davits, she looked very much neater and from her mizzen-gaff floated the national ensign. It was a ship known from San Diego to the top of the world—Uncle Sam's most famous revenue patrol boat, the *Bear.*

Childs, who had brought McPhee's ship in with the help of the half-incapacitated skipper, stood on the poop and looked over the men on the lighters intently.

A brisk, stout individual came around the corner of the derrick-barge. On the lapel of his coat was the emblem of one of the world's greatest fraternal orders. Childs leaned over the rail of the poop and waited. The man finally looked up. Childs gave a cabalistic signal.

The man appeared startled, then seemed about to turn away, figuring that the signal was an accident. Childs waved and repeated the motion. The man gave one look and then started on his devious way toward where the attorney was standing.

Skipper McPhee came from the cabin companionway, leaning on a cane. He drew up to Childs, then halted, looking absently toward shore. Finally he turned toward the attorney.

"Look here," he began awkwardly. "I want to say you've done good work." He cleared his throat in embarrassment, because he was not used to this sort of talk. "You've probably saved the ship and all on board. I've learned all about it. You kept your head level in spite of everything. You're—you're a rotten bad sailor but you're a man! Here's my hand on it!"

The bearded old bully thrust forward a hairy paw. Childs looked at the paw and then into the captain's eyes. The attorney remembered a lot of things—kidnaping, beatings, killing work, loathsome food and eternal arrogance from this skipper. If Childs took that hand, he must forgive all and lay aside all his plans for retribution. If he did not take that hand, Childs knew he could break the man forever—stamp him into the ground so he would never dare show his head in a civilized land.

Roger M. Childs, philosopher and gentleman, sighed and took the captain's paw.

"I'm glad it's come this way, sir," he said simply. "It saves trouble all around. I had something up my sleeve to punish you with—you and the mates and Slippery Joe and Paddy Lunt—but now I see that Fate has punished you enough."

"Punish? How?" demanded the skipper.

"Have you heard of the Western California Railroad? People say they own the Legislature and even the courts. People say they pretty near own the State."

"Well? What of it?"

"Oh, nothing; you've merely shanghaied the senior partner of Childs, Robinson & Frazier, consulting attorneys for the Western California Railroad—and the kidnaping was committed in California!"

The skipper looked nonplussed; then he started to assume his old attitude.

"Your name is Jones, so far as I know," he growled.

Childs ignored it.

"Paddy Lunt, Slippery Joe and the mates and you have been punished enough," ruled the attorney. "Lunt's leg will have to be amputated. You have a little extra dose coming. I imagine the owner of this ship will take great pleasure in discharging you, but that is out of my hands. Meantime, I'll have to take steps to prevent your becoming an outlaw, under the ban of a great secret order."

"What? What's all this?"

"I'll tell you all about it later, off your own deck. I want to give you a chance to change your tactics and be the sort of seaman you ought to be. At present you're a product of fear—the sort of fear that makes you a wild man aboard ship."

The skipper's pale face turned from white to purple. The attorney's attitude warned him that Childs held all the trumps and the mariner was dumfounded.

"What—how would you make me an outlaw?" he demanded.

Childs pointed to the starboard bulkhead below, where a man in business clothes was clambering over. Then he pointed toward the ship flying the national flag.

"In about ten minutes everybody is going to know I'm in Sitka, even that revenue cutter over there. You happen to have aboard the grand master of one of the most powerful secret orders in the world—the Order of the Sacred Oracle."

The Eight Vultures of Kwang-Ho

by Robert J. Pearsall

Author of "Undue Influence," "Fair Loot," etc.

TUI *FEI*, or earth evil—so the same majority of Chinese named the Ko Lao Hui, and in truth the whose vast, evil-doing society was like a fungus growth, a morbid excrescence, from the much disturbed soil of China politic.

In another sense, Hazard's simile of the giant octopus asprawl over the empire is a better one. Every province was gripped by its wide-flung tentacles. If a community rebelled, refused to pay tribute; if a magistrate was sane and courageous enough to distinguish between the true spirit of patriotism and the base perversion of it traded upon by the Ko Lao Hui—but this is a story of such a case.

It was really a tyranny of the base, this latter-day Ko Lao Hui. Beginning "when the Ming ended and the Ching began," that is, when the Manchus overran China, its first object was lofty enough, the delivery of the Chinese from their conquerors. That object was achieved in 1911. Directly afterward, I believe, the society was formally dissolved, but the order of dissolution was obeyed only by the nobler elements in it.

Anyway, when Hazard and I—who am John Partridge, searcher after the unusual—joined forces to combat its workings, it was larger in membership than ever before, its propaganda had shifted to revolution and warfare against the whole foreign world and it was ruled by a hidden intelligence as sinister and subtle as has ever misled a people.

It was, of course, to locate that secret intelligence—who falsely misnamed himself Koshinga, descendant of the founder by a strange road—that Hazard and I directed our first efforts. The earliest home of the Ko Lao Hui had been in Szuchuen, whence across Hanchungfu and the Ts'ing Ling Mountains it spread into Shensi, Kansu and over the rest of China.

Other information being absolutely unprocurable, we decided that the source was likeliest to be the center; and it was on our way to that ancient cradle of the *tong* that we encountered one of the weirdest forms of its devilry flaying the prostrate town of Kwang-Ho.

We heard inklings of the punishment in Sian-Fu, where we were furtively listening in the tea-shops, masking as usual our knowledge of the dialect behind a hired interpreter. It was enough to start us south at once.

From Sian-Fu to Kwang-Ho is a five-days journey, mostly through the Ts'ing Ling Range—hot, blisteringly hot in the Summer months. We made it in eight days, thanks to our muleteers, who managed to lose the way and were persuaded to find it again only at the pistol point.

We took it as an intimation that our mission in China was suspected, though of course we couldn't be sure. We'd kept always on our guard anyway, taking no chances. After Kwang-Ho there was no further doubt; the gage of battle was fairly thrown.

Kwang-Ho we found a little village of grayish-brown walls and soil and houses, wedged in the center of a triangular valley that cut up into the foot-hills from the south. We trudged into it from the east behind our two mules and muleteers, along a narrow trail that had been cut around the southern edge of Tung-Whan.

This peak was shaped something like a great cone; its sides were almost impenetrable with long, brown, dry grass, and trees and shrubbery living and dead. Perhaps it was our tired eyes and the superheated air, but the peak gave us both an impression of sullenness that scorching afternoon and the way it quivered from base to summit seemed to betoken some secret anger.

One might easily have imagined the frowning mountain as guardian of the village it had overlooked so long, but the first appearance of the village suggested no reason for its rage. Kwang-Ho stood out from the other towns we'd recently seen like a settlement of Chinese bourgeoise.

All around it, up and down the valley, were rectangular, rock-fenced fields of astonishing greenness, considering that the river curved into the valley a mile below the town and so would ordinarily have been considered useless for irrigation.

Equally remarkable for Central China were the absence of beggars at the gate of the centuries-old wall that surrounded the town and the fact that no inhospitable odors insulted our nostrils as we passed through that gate. The houses averaged at least a room larger than usual and the streets were wider and strangely clean.

"No wonder the Ko Lao Hui hates this town," said Hazard.

But our comment upon these phenomena was cut short. A boy playing just inside the gate was off in a whirl of dust, crying out: "*Yang kwei tsu, yang kwei tsu!*" (Ocean ghost children.) And hard upon the apparent cause of the Ko Lao Hui's anger came signs of its result.

The doorways of the street we were entering became filled with many curiously depressed faces—yellowish-brown faces with black, slant, staring eyes and rather primitive, immobile features. We saw, too, that nearly half those doorways were hung with white and blue lanterns and edged with white cloth, symbols of mourning. At the same time we became aware that a certain weird sound we'd been hearing for some minutes was really the wailing of women.

"*Ai ya, ai ya,*" it came strong to our ears in a dozen voices, the eloquent mourning cry of the East.

At that Hazard's deceptively professorial face, inexperienced-looking and quiet, became a shade whiter beneath the tan.

"The work's begun," he said, in his mildly thoughtful voice, "whatever it is."

"Most characteristic work, by appearances."

"Well," suggested Hazard, "let's get on to the inn."

"With all my heart," I agreed, for of course we were both dog-tired, footsore and sticky with sweat under our loose native jackets and trousers of China blue.

I PASSED the word to our leading muleteer. Instantly he turned *mafu*, abandoning his animal to his companion and running ahead of us, loudly inquiring the way. Some small perquisites would be his as a reward for bringing, or rather preceding, our patronage. Also it was best for our comfort's sake that the innkeeper be notified of our coming.

We followed, by dint of many questions, through a maze of streets well calculated to confuse strangers and evil spirits. We weren't surprized that these streets cleared before and filled in behind us, and that everywhere, around the irregular street corners, around the corners of houses, from behind half-open doors and through slits in the paper windows, were curiously peering eyes.

White men in Shensi are rare enough, particularly white men traveling alone, without a guard of soldiery. Our apparent courage was, however, only prudence—the Ko Lao Hui being too strong among the common soldiery for us to provide our enemies with a handle to our destruction by hiring them for an escort.

Really, the curiosity of the people was much less noisy and eager than in most villages. A sort of apathetic, helpless terror seemed to hang over Kwang-Ho. Especially was this noticeable among the children, who were an unusually well-nourished and ruddy-cheeked lot and would ordinarily have been boldly and inquisitively friendly. Instead, the few little faces we saw were sobered and chilled as if by some hardly understood terror.

Hazard and I made no comment on this, it being largely what we'd expected. The intellect that had marked Kwang-Ho for its anger was no ordinary one and would strike in no ordinary fashion. But presently——

"Listen!" I said sharply to Hazard.

From a point a little ahead of us and to the right, probably in the market-place, came the sound of masculine chanting. It was a recital, a sort of story-song, weirdly and mournfully sung, far different from the usual cheerfully accented recital of the village distributors of news and fiction:

"The vultures came—
Black was the sky with them—
Laden with death for the children of Kwang-Ho.
The vultures came—
Heavy their sable wings.
Loud was the mourning in Kwang-Ho the Good."

This was repeated many times, with variations in the words but with no additional meaning. It puzzled me. I knew vultures were widely symbolic of death in Shensi; but in this chantey the connection, though vaguely enough expressed, seemed emphasized beyond the bounds of symbolism. Of course, things altogether unrelated in fact are often related in imagination.

"But the Ko Lao Hui?" inquired Hazard, after I'd translated the song to him as best I could. "Isn't there any mention of them?"

"Not a word."

His question reminded me of the peculiar fact that though from time to time, as we'd passed along the narrow street, I'd caught snatches of talk from within the stricken houses, there had never been a mention of the guilty society. Hate there'd been in plenty, but hate expending itself as it were in vacuum——

"As if," I suggested to Hazard, "Kwang-Ho doesn't know yet the cause of its troubles."

"I noticed that," said Hazard.

Though he hadn't quite my knowledge of the Shensi dialect, he could follow an ordinary conversation well enough.

"Well," he continued after a thoughtful pause, "we'd best get to the *yamen* as soon as possible. If what we heard in Sian-Fu is true, the magistrate will know, anyway. And he should be willing to talk. Look, another house in mourning, and another."

Just then our muleteer turned off the street into a courtyard. Its brown, hard-packed earth floor was cluttered with donkeys, mules, two-wheeled carts with wide-projecting axle-trees, sacks of grain and bundles of cloth. In a corner six camels, night-travelers, lifted their ugly, empty heads and stared at us with seeming insolence. A mixed group of traveling merchants, muleteers and coolies, drawn together by the fascinations of "turn-over," stopped their game and joined in that stare, but in a minute were intent again on the rapid play of the copper coins.

The innkeeper, a middle-aged, cleanly clad Chinese, was half-way across the courtyard, approaching us with a succession of low bows. Across the further side of the courtyard was the gray-walled inn, long and narrow, with many small cubicles. The one which Hazard and I were presently sharing was at least cleaner and more comfortable than any in which we had recently slept.

Also we found in the place a bathtub hollowed out of stone, a barrel-shaped affair, the product of huge labor. And the brick stove upon which we proceeded to cook our own food—which for caution's sake we always carried with us, together with our bedding, on mule-back—was marvelously furnished with a tin chimney, the first "carrier-away-of-smoke" we'd seen in nearly a moon.

"Behold the spirit of progress," I half jested to Hazard.

"And its opponent, the spirit of the devil," replied Hazard, the corners of whose usually goodnatured mouth were drawn downward grimly. "But I rather think we'll like this magistrate what's-his-name—Li Ming Shan. He does his town well, anyway. And he's not afraid to die by it."

"For it, you mean?" I corrected.

"For it and by it both," he said. "You know the Chinese theory of a magistrate's responsibility—flattering but uncomfortable. And if, besides, he has taken it upon himself to defy the Ko Lao Hui, with this result——"

After a moment's thought, I understood. Li Ming Shan was very probably in a bad way.

I UNDERSTOOD still better after our talk with the magistrate. This took place in the reception room of the *yamen*, which building constituted both his private and official residences. To reach the reception room we passed through the usual triple courtyards connected by semicircular doors, the walls decorated by frescoes of fruits and flowers, sages sporting with butterflies, gods hobnobbing with horned devils.

In truth, it was all ancient enough. And the official chair, lanterns, tablets, swords and umbrellas for the processional which were disposed beneath the arch of the entrance to the *yamen* were evidence that the master of the place estimated properly the still existing value of the old ceremonials. But Li Ming Shan himself was so modernized in his ideas that I marveled at finding him in an obscure town in the heart of Old China.

That was before I learned that his sojourn in Kwang-Ho had begun as a banishment by the Manchus some time before the revolution for unduly favoring foreign education as a Taotai in Shantung. Here, of course, as are the magistrate of most small villages, he was allowed almost free rein, and his rule was very nearly absolute. He was a little over middle age, rather slender in a land where slenderness isn't usual in the ruling class, bespectacled, wrinkled of face, bright of eye, and as worried-looking as he would allow himself to appear.

Hazard, of course, made himself as inconspicuous as possible and talked as little. He could blend neutrally into any background more successfully than any other man I've ever known. Nevertheless, I knew there wasn't a word, a gesture or a tone of the magistrate's that went unnoticed by him.

After sipping tea and exchanging polite formalities for some time I came to the point of our call—and was surprized to find very little hesitation on Li Ming Shan's part. Perhaps he knew more of us than we thought, and knew besides that the interests of all white men were opposed to the interests of the Ko Lao Hui. Perhaps, too, he felt that no act of ours could put him in a worse position than were his already.

"It is true," he said after I had remarked significantly concerning the number of mourning signs before the houses of Kwang-Ho. Then he paused.

" 'There are two words we must all learn: no continuance,' " he quoted the old proverb of his philosophical race.

I conceived that pause as a tentative invitation and spoke up bluntly:

"Many are dying before their time. It is because of that we have come here. Eight days ago your servants heard evil talk in Sian-Fu. It was that Kwang-Ho, because of the righteous rule of your Excellency, was to be punished by the *tu fei* or Ko Lao Hui, misnamed by themselves Elder Brothers. Hearing that and greatly desiring to help, we came quickly but stupidly, for we were lost in the hills."

In the middle of my speech Li Ming Shan signed to me to lower my voice, though we were alone in the reception hall.

"The little bird (gossip) whispered the truth. The Ko Lao Hui are angry with Kwang-Ho. Death is sown in the night and springs up from the ground in the morning."

"But why?" I asked sharply.

Li Ming Shan lifted his arms in mild deprecation.

"It is the taxes," he explained gently. "From study I learned a certain truth, that the money paid by the people in taxes should be given back to them in service. Injudiciously I carried out that truth, abolishing squeeze. The national tax I sent to Pekin but the local taxes, the *likin* and *lotishui*, I used in giving the people certain things you have seen. There are also schools in which are taught the old truths and the new, and ten water-wheels that lift the water to the highest fields. Thus I have promoted contentment; and for that do the Ko Lao Hui hate me."

"The money should have been turned over to them?" I suggested.

Li Ming Shan bowed, smiling placidly.

"Are they not the patriots?" he asked with detached and half-humorous cynicism.

To me, he had very nearly defined patriotism, and it lay not with the Ko Lao Hui. I said something to that effect rather hotly.

"I have some thousands of *tael* in the treasury," he went on to explain. "The Ko Lao Hui, through Shen Yun of Sian-Fu, made demands. There was no other town in Shensi who had not made patriotic contribution to the fund. When I made a polite refusal I was told I must die for the sake of the cause and at the hands of my own people, who must also be punished. Then Shen Yun went swiftly away and a blight came against the children of Kwang-Ho."

"Against the children only?" I cried.

The thing was worse than we'd imagined, inconceivable.

Li Ming Shan bowed.

"It is the work of the baser devils."

"And the people of Kwang-Ho, the parents—they do not know why their children die?" I asked, though I thought I knew the answer beforehand.

"They do not know. They will not know until the end of the sixth day of punishment, of which this is the third. Then they will be told, and that I, their magistrate, could have saved their children had I paid over the money which is theirs, and that the Ko Lao Hui falsely claim. Already the people clamor against me, who am their mandarin and magistrate and responsible for whatever comes over the town."

"They will kill you when they are told," I said briefly.

"They will kill me," agreed Li Ming Shan in his gentle voice. "I do not fear death. We must all die—and why should we quarrel with the gods as to how or when? But the fate of the little children troubles me. However, having entered the path, there is no turning back."

"You could pay the money now," I suggested.

"Nevertheless, the six days of punishment would be completed. It is a warning to the other towns, that they may not be tempted to refuse tribute. All Shensi must make contribution to the Ko Lao Hui."

"But how is it done—what weapon do they use?"

Li Ming Shan didn't reply instantly. For a moment he sat silent, his beautifully kept hands folded lightly in his lap, his silk-clad, slender figure immobilely upright, his bright eyes staring straight forward. From his look, or possibly from his as yet unspoken thought, I got that suggestion of mysticism that one so often encounters—a weakening wind to the will—in the East.

"He who fights the Ko Lao Hui fights the air," he answered at last. "Many thousand devils assist them. They send death from far off. It is past understanding. In this case," he added in a more practical tone, "they strike the children while at play in the morning."

It wasn't at all strange to find this educated nobleman—I use that last word advisedly in its truest sense—succumbing apathetically to a belief in the invulnerability of the Ko Lao Hui. There's no doubting the many merits of the Chinese; but the twin spirits of superstitition and fatalism have long sepulchered the race.

I had decided that nothing more was to be gotten out of Li Ming Shan and that it was time to go, when Hazard spoke up in rather sharp assertion—

"If you cared to communicate with the Ko Lao Hui this afternoon, you could do so."

The magistrate turned toward him and bowed courteously. Casting back to see where Hazard had got the information, I realized that it had been in the tone of Li Ming Shan's answer to my suggestion that he could stop the killing by paying the money.

"A certain way has been left open," said the magistrate. "A signal may be given and a message left in a certain place. But there are no Ko Lao Hui in Kwang-Ho."

"Then you will do your servants a favor," said Hazard. "Instantly you will speak good words to the Ko Lao Hui and tell them that the two strangers that have come to Kwang-Ho are their enemies and should be killed."

I DON'T know whether Li Ming Shan or I was more surprized at this suggestion. Li Ming Shan expostulated politely. Hazard, however, only became more firm in his insistence that the Ko Lao Hui should be warned against us. To give the warning weight and added credibility, he even informed Li Ming Shan of certain of our recent movements and future plans that we had agreed should be kept secret. I remained silent, not wishing to confuse counsel by opposing him; but I couldn't figure out what was in his mind.

At last Li Ming Shan agreed, though plainly with inward scruples. A message would be sent to the Ko Lao Hui within the hour denouncing us and urging our destruction. That message would doubtless reach the hidden membership that were working the society's wrath upon Kwang-Ho before nightfall. Although Hazard, who monopolized our latter part of the conversation as I had the former, reiterated my declaration that we had come to Kwang-Ho to fight the Ko Lao Hui, I could feel behind Li Ming Shan's courteous dismissal something like regret that we'd touched the matter. Plainly he didn't relish doing that which would, to his mind, insure our death.

But before we got back to the inn I was quite of a mind with Hazard. A few words spoken by him convinced me—but just preceding those words was our first glimpse of Kwang-Ho's incredibly cruel punishment.

Ahead of us a bare-legged, barefooted boy, bright-eyed and healthy looking, was playing in the middle of the gray, dusty street. We were almost upon him before he saw us. With childish fear he started to run ahead of us, probably toward his home. Of a sudden he emitted a cry of pain, as though struck by some invisible flying missile. He fell in the middle of the street and curled one leg around as if he would grip his foot with his hand. But the next instant he was up again, now sobbing bitterly.

He ran on for about a hundred yards, swaying with increasing weakness, and then dropped again.

When we got to him he was the center of a group of Chinese. They seemed not particularly excited. Before we could examine the boy a woman picked him up and carried him into a house and the crowd began to scatter, tossing this puzzling remark back and forth in the age-old fashion of a Chinese crowd.

"It is the devil that comes in the evening, not as powerful as the morning devil. He will not die."

This corroborated the puzzling impression Li Ming Shan had already given us, that this strange death only came in the morning. It also considerably increased our perplexity, although, as we saw it later, the incident really contained a clue to the whole mystery. But it also brought me completely in sympathy with Hazard's purpose, which he now revealed.

"The logical process takes time," he said. "We can't take time while children are dying. Now, the principal thing in this problem is to discover the weapon they're using. If we draw their fire we'll come close to discovering it. A thing that will kill children will kill grown men. And the men that have been set to punishing Kwang-Ho are probably only tools, non-original. They'll use the same weapon, probably wielded differently. Anyway," he apologized, "it had to come to open warfare sometime."

Truly, the speediest way was the best. It had hurt to see that boy struck down.

We got back to the inn shortly before dark. That evening we talked to the innkeeper, an intelligent man who had traveled. Without seeming to believe in it himself, he referred to the villagers' superstition that certain vultures were somehow connected with Kwang-Ho's calamity. They were eight in number, he said, and for three mornings they had passed over Kwang-Ho just before sunrise, coming out of the hills in the west. Plainly, they brought the morning devil—the evening devil being, according to popular belief, quite another and less virulent individual.

Although the innkeeper rejected this, he had no other explanation to make of the mortality, which was quite outside his experience and hence quite unprecedented in human affairs. This was his modest statement. Again we heard that the children were always attacked while at play in the streets. When Hazard suggested that the parents should keep their children indoors, he replied with a variation of Li Ming Shan's fatalism, that it would do no good, as the devils would follow those whom they wanted and might in revenge attack other members of the household. Shensi, it will be remembered, is as many days' travel from Pekin as Pekin is from California, and as widely separated as to ideas.

Anyway, Hazard and I left the innkeeper with a mutual desire to rise in the morning early enough to watch the passing of the mysterious vultures. After all, we agreed, it was curious.

WE LAY awake on the *k'ang* a long time that night discussing the problem, but with no added light. It wasn't at all hard to understand the heaviness of Kwang-Ho's punishment, for rebellion against tyranny is the most contagious thing on earth, and if the other towns in Shensi were to remain in the line of tribute bearers, Kwang-Ho must be forced into that line. And the castigation was indeed the most severe that could be devised, for the peasantry of

China in general is a sound and healthy people, loving its offspring intensely and only belied by the reputation of the coast scum. But as to the nature of the discriminating death the Ko Lao Hui was sending upon the town, we couldn't as yet even surmise.

At last we slept, alert even in our sleep as we'd learned to be and with our hands never more than three inches from our revolvers. We were to arise at five, an hour before sunrise; and I remember I nudged Hazard and Hazard nudged me at exactly the same moment, so well had we trained ourselves to wake on schedule. Five minutes later we'd passed out into the courtyard.

We found it deserted, even the animals having been gotten under some sort of shelter from the heavy night dew. Indeed, quiet lay over the whole town, a relief after the plaintive cries of yesterday. If, as was almost certain, there were others that watched for the coming of the ill-omened birds, they watched in silence—peeping furtively, I imagined, out of half-opened doors and unscreened windows. I made some sort of joke at our own folly in not keeping shelter over our heads, if indeed the vultures shed death from their wings. But I found Hazard wasn't in a joking mood.

"Well," he said, "say what you will, if the flight of the vultures actually takes place every morning as they say, it's as unaccountable as the deaths, only less momentous. Vultures haven't any such habits, if I remember my natural history. And when two things are separately unaccountable it's only natural to feel they might explain each other."

"No doubt it's food that draws them," I suggested.

"Exactly. It couldn't be anything else. But if there's food to the east of the town, why do they return nightly to the west of it? If it was the nesting season there might be an explanation, but it isn't."

We were silent awhile, watching the sky over the black hills to the west. As usual, the morning was to be a cloudless one. Everywhere the heavens were brilliant with stars, save in the east, where they were paling before the sunrise.

"Besides, it's too early in the morning," said Hazard at length. "It's too early for them to start. And, see, there they are."

He pointed them out by stepping behind me and laying his arm over my shoulder. I followed the line of his extended arm until, very close to the horizon, my eye caught a group of black specks. I counted them—one, two, three—eight.

"It's the same number," I said.

"Now why?" murmured Hazard softly. "Why?"

They came on swiftly, and they couldn't have been far from the town when they rose. It was hard for me to reasonably account for my undeniable feeling of uneasiness as they approached it. I reminded myself that men have always revolted instinctively from the carrion bird. Its somber color, its rapacious beak and head, its peculiar heaviness and stiffness of wing, its every unlovely characteristic have long been associated in the mind with all that is grim and sinister and related to death. Nevertheless I followed their course with fascinated eyes. They were undoubtedly going to pass directly over us, over the center of the town.

They did. And as they passed I heard a sound which we mistook at the time for a faint rushing of wings. Nevertheless I thought I heard Hazard shudder.

"I felt—" he half-whispered and stopped.

"What did you say?" I asked in a peculiarly hushed voice.

"Nothing." Then, after a moment, with reluctant frankness, "I started to say I felt the passing of death. It's nonsense, of course—nervousness and the eery sight of those damnable birds."

Well, I wasn't so sure of that, even then. One of Hazard's qualities was a certain keenness of intuition that often threatened conflict with his reasoning—and never quite did.

But I said nothing, and in silence we watched the vultures speed away in a long, wavering line to the east. Soon it was apparent they were going to light somewhere near the crest of Tung-Whan. Now they were a mere black streak against the lesser blackness of the mountain. Now they had disappeared, melted into it entirely. We watched a long time but they made no reappearance against the brightening sky. Whatever they had left behind them, they themselves were safe on that densely wooded summit.

"The children have bare feet," exclaimed Hazard suddenly and seemingly apropos of nothing, after that long silence. "They alone have bare feet!"

"Ah the gray earth!
Gone is the good of it.
Deadly the earth for the children of Kwang-Ho.
Dark was the sky,
Darkened with sable wings;
Now the white fruitage for Kwang-Ho the Good."

Immediately upon Hazard's incomprehensible exclamation, the street singer, who had evidently watched the passing of the vultures, began his sóng again, simple as the lives of his people, deep with sadness as their sorrow.

"That's their only point of difference," resumed Hazard. "Come, let's walk."

I NEVER have known whether Hazard had already divined the solution of the mystery. A sudden horror had seemed to possess him, driving him to activity, but I myself felt the same desire. If we were already marked for slaughter by the Ko Lao Hui—as we would be if Li Ming Shan's message had gotten through—let them strike swiftly, let us come quickly to grips! The last half-hour had immeasurably increased my feeling in the matter, had turned my hatred into loathing—a change I'll not try to explain. But, as I started to say, Hazard was no man to claim credit after the event; and almost immediately after we left the courtyard the Ko Lao Hui betrayed itself.

Fumes of cooking and low-hanging smoke filled the narrow street into which we passed from the courtyard. Though the morning was yet dim, the village was waking, in a sad, unusual silence. A few faces glowered out from the doorways at the "undesirable aliens with no settled habitation"—such we had become over night. It wouldn't be long before, harassing their brains for the cause of their troubles, they would blame us.

We had started north from the inn into an unfamiliar neighborhood. Indeed, a few steps and we were in an *impassé*. The narrow crooked street had dwindled into an alley, terminated suddenly by a crumbling old wall. Only doorless and mostly windowless backs of houses bordered this alley. It was as lonely a place as one could hope to find in Kwang-Ho—which I afterward suspected was the reason Hazard led the way into it. And I followed eagerly, though I've never courted death. The queer, vindictive passion into which the sight of the vultures had thrown me made me reckless in my desire to give assassination its chance.

So when I heard the lightest of footsteps behind us I didn't turn immediately. I did slacken my pace, however; and Hazard, whose ears were at least as keen as mine, dropped back until he was abreast of me. Presently we stopped and faced about. Not over six paces from us was a very ancient and ragged beggar, stumbling after us in a half-trot, holding his left hand up beseechingly. The right arm swung loosely by his side as if palsied.

"*Mao chi'en! Mao chi'en!*"

I flung him a few coppers. He stooped stiffly and painfully and fumbled up from the ground.

"*Cheeba!* Be off!" I said.

He edged closer, bent and decrepit, squinting up at us, mumbling thanks. But immediately he recommenced his persistent beggar's whine—greedy, insatiable, demanding after the fashion of his kind the more for that he had already received beyond expectations.

"*Mao chi'en!* You are rich men, I am poor beggar; you give me a silver dollar."

He played the part of a beggar well but he was no beggar. He had neglected one part of his make-up. Long fingernails are much esteemed by the Chinese; and for a moment I smiled inwardly at the thought that this man's pride had betrayed him. But it wasn't pride. Long finger-nails may sometimes be useful.

"No more. Be off!" I repeated harshly.

For answer, the fellow leaped.

He shed his decrepitude like the cloak it was. His meanly vindictive face smoothed magically under the dirt and his twisted body straightened itself. He was really a young man. His right arm, that had appeared palsied, flashed upward. He struck as a serpent strikes, in midspring. He struck at both our faces. His fingers were like talons, spread-out, curving, horrible.

"'Ware his nails—his nails," cried Hazard.

The warning wasn't needed. I don't know how I escaped that swift attack, don't know how I caught the wrist of the hand that thrust at me. If we hadn't been expecting some such thing I suppose we would both have died. And our death at the hand of an unarmed Chinese beggar would have been as great a mystery as, up to that moment, had been the mortality among the children of Kwang-Ho.

For, after all, even if Hazard had got a hint of the truth at the passing of the vultures, he needed this attack which he had invited to lend it definiteness. In other words, he still needed to know the weapon, that terrific weapon which was capable of killing silently, invisibly, from a distance, with which the false beggar, agent of the Ko Lao Hui, had hoped to destroy the two of us.

It didn't surprize me any to find that Hazard was holding the would-be assassin by the other wrist. Quietly observant, I believe Hazard had read the fellow's intentions before he sprang, and was more ready for him than I. Anyway, my companion in these affairs was capable of feline swiftness of movement.

"Watch your hold!" warned Hazard.

For the man, finding himself held off from us, had altered his attack. Now he was trying to reach the back of the hands that held his wrists, curling his fingers around, trying to dig into our flesh with those long talons of his.

"I know," I cried. "His nails are poisoned."

"With the same poison that killed the children," said Hazard rapidly.

Whether the man understood our words I know not, but at that he began struggling with redoubled violence. And suddenly I found myself filled with such absolute detestation as I never before felt for a living thing. With all the strength of my free fist, I struck his arm at the elbow, and, throwing myself forward against his suddenly flaccid muscles, I dragged those clutching fingers down his left cheek. From high cheek bone to brutal jaw three streaks of blood sprang out.

My hand went over his mouth as I twisted his arm behind him. Quickly we improvized a gag, for his screams of terror and despair would, if we had allowed them to pass his lips, have brought the living children of Kwang-Ho into the death-strewn streets. A little later we lowered him, writhing, to the ground.

"So!" said Hazard thoughtfully. "So!"

"It's *bashlai* or *catipan*," I said. "Or some equally deadly poison. There are many known in the East."

But while the agent of the Ko Lao Hui lay dying, Hazard stooped and searched cautiously in the gray, loose earth that lay under our feet like a mat. Presently he rose with a thin splinter of granite in his hand—a splinter not a quarter of an inch long, sharp as a needle and discolored at the point with a brown stain that matched the brown tips of the dying man's finger nails. Lying half-imbedded in the dust, it had been as unnoticeable as would have been the prick of it on the foot of a child in convulsions. It was clear. Hundreds of these imbued with a deadly poison—a poison, however, that lost its virtue with time—with these tiny weapons had the Ko Lao Hui struck.

"But how are they scattered?" I cried.

"Well," said Hazard, "if we can—it's a wild hope—but if we can capture the vultures——"

WE COULDN'T. It was perhaps as well that we weren't suffered to try. But after we had told the people of Kwang-Ho what was essential—enough to terminate the death-list—we found matters taken out of our hands. They, as well as we, had seen the vultures alight on Tung-Whan. They, as well as we, could deduce that by midafternoon the murderer or murderers who had released the vultures in the morning would have returned to Tung-Whan to get them again. And to them as to us there was but one sure agency for their destruction.

Fire! Fire about the base of Tung-Whan. A thousand darting tongues of it, a thousand licking, leaping flames. Fire crackling angrily, hissing through the dry, brown grass, springing with white intensity into the masses of dead underbrush, fallen and decaying trees, the débris of centuries. And behind that fire advanced an implacable cordon, silent as Chinese seldom are, filled with a settled and measured purpose. Variously armed were they, with clubs, rakes, hoes and long and deadly knives; but they never needed to use those arms.

The firebrands were enough. In the beginning there was no wind and the thin, pale smoke, shot through with white flames, rose wraithlike straight up toward the heavens. But soon the superheated air in the center of that circle of flame drove upward, and from all directions was the vacuum filled. The ravines became as flues. The mountain became the white-hot core of a great wind which poured in from all sides, and whirled to the sky in a blast of shriveling flame. I suppose that whatever fled before that encircling death died of the heat and smoke and oxygenless air long before the actual fire reached them.

But the Chinese took no chances. All night they watched around the still smoking mountain. All night, and in the morning Hazard and I, beating them up the side of the mountain, found what we found.

In the center of a circle of barren rock, on the very summit of the mountain, we found the charred remains of four men who would never again work the criminal will of the Ko Lao Hui.

"But, look here," cried Hazard. "We're lucky. They must have kept them till the very end in hopes of escape."

For scattered about where they'd been dropped as the place became an inferno were eight large wire bird-cages, and inside those cages the burnt bodies of the vultures. Still attached to each bird by tiny wires encircling it under the wings was a small cubical metal box, painted black, in the bottom of which was a long, narrow door, swinging outward. In each door and in the side of each box near the edge of the door were small circular holes through which a cord might have been passed. Thus, we supposed, the door had been held shut.

"But the cord was probably really a time fuse, with a trailing end, touched with a match when the vultures were released and just long enough to burn to the knot by the time the vultures reached Kwang-Ho."

This was Hazard's guess. There were of course other devices that might have been used to release the door so that the poisoned darts, the tiny, sharp rock fragments with which the boxes had been loaded, would sift down upon the offending town.

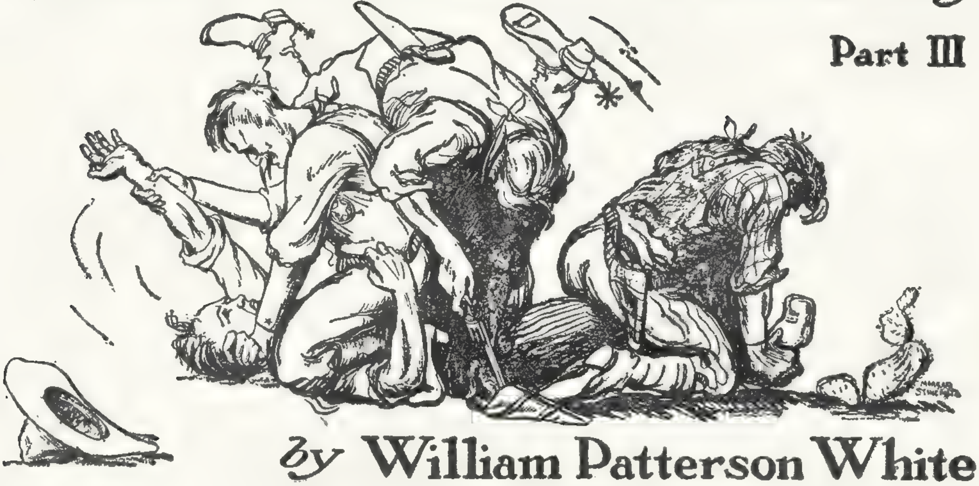
"After all," I sighed, "though we've saved Kwang-Ho for the time, and Li Ming Shan, too—for of course we'll not add to the prestige of the Ko Lao Hui by crediting them with this—after all, it's only a skirmish, and our first. But at least in destroying these men and their trained vultures and the store of poison they must still have had in their possession, we've robbed the society of a very terrifying weapon."

"But a simple one," mused Hazard. "Indeed, what a very simple thing it was! The simplicity of a genius in crime."

Lynch Lawyers

A Five Part Story

Part III



by William Patterson White

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The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

WITH a clatter of hurrying hoofs the posse rode out of town. With it rode Red Kane.

That fifty thousand in gold had been stolen from the express office at Farewell did not worry Red a great deal—ten thousand had been for Bill Lanpher, boss of the 88, and Red's outfit did not love the 88—but Red's little black horse had gone with the money. Red wanted that horse.

Five miles out of Farewell the posse came upon the express box and safe, both open and empty, and two teams of stolen mules. Red and his brother Tom rode on.

"What are you doin'?" A dark-eyed girl looked out of the deserted K C ranch-house at Sweetwater Mountain.

Red Kane told her.

"I see. You thought maybe my father or I had your horse. People think nesters will do 'most anything. Yes, they do. We came by the 88, and the manager was pretty disagreeable. What's his name? Lanpher? Well, you two go back to Lanpher and tell him Dot Lorimer said next time to come himself. Slide, the two of you!"

She trained a Winchester on Red's stomach. Not until he and Tom had gone swiftly away from there did Red remember he was using a borrowed saddle marked with the 88 brand. Then, to Tom's amaze, he grinned.

"Some girl!" he said. "Some girl!"

Riding out of town next day, Red and Kansas Casey, deputy sheriff, came upon a man pinned under a fallen cottonwood.

"I live at the old K C ranch," he whispered. "My name is Lorimer."

At the K C ranch, Dot Lorimer bandaged her father's bruised side. Then she turned to Red Kane, and her black eyes narrowed.

"You're awfully persistent about coming out here," she said. "What are your intentions?"

"I'm gona marry you!"

Came a clatter of hoofs. Sixteen dusty men rode up to the ranch-house. Red noted four with distaste—Durkin, Lenn, Dill, Cox.

"We want this here Lorimer feller," said Carlson, the leader. "The stage was held up, and we think this gent knows something about it. And about the express robbery, too."

"Well," said Kansas Casey, "I guess we'll have to search the house."

Into the house they went. *Bang!* Out they came. Cox nursed a punctured hand. Lorimer's injury hadn't affected his trigger finger.

"We didn't find nothin'," said Durkin, "but I'll bet he held up that stage, just the same."

Bang again. In Durkin's hair appeared a neat crease. Dot Lorimer held a smoking gun.

"Anybody else think my father is a road-agent?" she asked pleasantly.

No one did. The lynching party went away.

Back in Farewell, old Mr. Saltoun, Red's boss, leaned against the jamb of the express office and felt something pricking his shoulder. It was a broken knife blade. Red Kane found the knife. It bore the initials B. L.

What was Lorimer's first name?

And Bill Lanpher, come to howl about his ten thousand, went away with two quart bottles and the conviction that the nesters at the K C ranch had his gold.

RED KANE saw him disappearing along the southern trail and longed to follow, but Kansas Casey restrained him.

At the bar of the Starlight Saloon Red and his brother Tom met Carlson of the lynching party. Involuntarily Red shifted his hand toward his hip.

"No hard feelin's," said Carlson, "but look out for Lenn and Dill."

At the dance-hall Red found both—Dill too drunk to fight, but Lenn in a nasty mood. No guns were used, and after the fight was over Red made only one complaint:

"Y' oughta make yore chairs heavier. If the one I used had five more pounds heft, I'd a knocked him silly first crack."

Next morning, after making sure Lenn had left town, Red did an unusual thing, he shaved. At the Nesters' ranch-house he found Lorimer alone, mumbling feverishly on his bed:

"I got that money, and it's mine! I'd 'a' killed him, by ——, if I'd had to, but I didn't—I didn't!"

From the window Red saw a troop of horsemen topping a hill a few miles away. There was only one thing to do. He gagged Lorimer, for he was shrieking, in his delirium, words that would mean death if the approaching troop should hear him.

"Yuh li'l' fool!" whispered Red fiercely as he found himself gazing down the barrel of a Winchester and then into Dot Lorimer's flashing eyes.

She kicked and clawed as he took the gun away but, finally, he forced her to listen and, before the horsemen arrived, had almost made her believe in him.

Standing in the doorway, Red watched Lanpher and his punchers gallop up. Each drop in the two quart bottles had strengthened Lanpher's courage and his conviction that Lorimer was the thief.

"I'm gonna go in that house, an' you nor no other man is gonna stop me."

Red disagreed and, as a result, it was nineteen days before he realized that his body had received four chunks of lead. But Lampher, too, was layed up and also three of his punchers.

Tom Dowling of the 88 outfit had stood by Red, and that had saved Red's life. Dot Lorimer had nursed him.

Red's brother Tom heard about the fight and started out with blood in his eye. A few days later there was a wounded man at 88 to represent each one of the holes in Red's body. Though Red's boss, Saltoun, fired Red as soon as he heard the news, it was too late to stop the feud raging between Bar S and 88.

Two things were worrying Red. One was Tom Dowling, for Red felt he had a rival; the other was a mysterious stranger seen before the fight at Farewell, and again at Lorimer's.

"WILL you marry me?" asked Red one afternoon during his recovery.

Dot's evasive answer left some hope in Red's heart.

"The stage's been held up again south o' Injun Ridge an' they robbed the gov'nor o' the Territory."

Jake Rule and Kansas Casey, his deputy, broke off their visit to Red hastily, but Bill Derr, a criminal-expert in that part of the country, remained to talk with Red.

"You dropped yore knife, misses."

Dot Lorimer took the knife and examined it.

"That's funny; it has dad's initials."

Red Kane hastily jammed his hands in his pockets and found a hole. It was the knife he had found engraved B. L. He had also found a coin with the same initials. That had gone through the hole, too, for now Lorimer was examining both curiously.

"Now ain't that amazin'—my initials an' everything."

"I lost them," said Red.

Derr walked over to examine them and asked—

"Wher didja get John Hudson's knife?"

"John Hudson's!" exclaimed Red. "Then how does the B. L. fit in?"

"Brand," explained Derr. "B. L. was his iron. But where did you find 'em?"

"That's all right Bill, if there's any reward comin' I'm gonna get it alone."

Red found Lorimer's eyes searching his keenly.

"Didja know that was my initials, Red?"

Red looked innocently at him:

"How could I? Yore daughter always called yuh 'pa'!"

CHAPTER XVII

THINNER ICE

IT WAS a week later. Mr. Lorimer had taken one of the wagons and gone to Sweetwater Mountain to cut wood. He was getting in the Winter's supply.

Red, now quite recovered—he was leaving for Farewell in the morning—sat cross-kneed on a sack beside the spring and watched Miss Lorimer darning socks. She was sitting on a chair he had made for her out of a strip of canvas torn from an old wagon-cover and peeled young cottonwood trunks.

The sun shone in a blue and cloudless sky. But it was not hot. A vagrom breeze was shaking the tops of the cottonwoods, and the leaves were flittering and rustling with pleasant little snaps and crackles. The play of the leaves made a play of lights and shadows on the head and figure of Miss Lorimer. There was one small patch of sun at the corner of her mouth that came and went with the dimple there. Red watched with fascinated eyes.

"Say," he remarked suddenly, "have you seen anythin' o' my green handkerchief?"

"I saw it," she replied with meaning.

"Where? I had it yest'day, but she was gone this mornin'. Where'd I put it, anyway?"

"You hung it on the back of a chair. I put it away where it would be safe."

"Safe? Whyfor safe?"

She lifted her dark eyes. There was an amused twinkle in their cool depths.

"I couldn't stand it any longer," she told him. "I just couldn't. It used to set my teeth on edge to watch you wear that vivid green thing with your gray shirt speckled with those horrible purple horse-shoes."

"Horrible?" His face fell.

"Horrible. Heavens, Red! Don't you know that green and purple swear at each other?"

"Swear?" He was still over his head.

"Clash, then. The two colors don't go together. They're awful, Red. Honestly."

"Tom did say them an' my red head together would be kind o' bright," he admitted. "But I thought they was pretty. I liked them purple hoss-shoes, an' that green sort o' set 'em off like."

"You bet it set 'em off. It's a wonder they didn't explode. Promise me not to wear that green handkerchief with that shirt, won't you?"

"Shore I will. Anythin' yuh say goes. If them colors don't hitch, they don't, thassal. Can I wear the shirt?"

She smiled adorably.

"The shirt'll pass—the horse-shoes aren't so strikin' as they were. They faded in the washin'. It made the gray streaky a little, too. I'm sorry. I couldn't help it."

"Thassal right. Don't let that worry yuh. Them hoss-shoes was always too bright an' I like my shirt streaky. Yuh needn't laugh. I do, honest. Lordy, think o' yuh knowin' them colors didn't ride together. An' me thinkin' they was all right alla time. I'm ignorant. I know it. I guess now that's one of the reasons yuh think I don't love yuh—'cause I bulge right ahead doin' what I oughtn't to do. I guess that's one o' the reasons shore-'nough."

"Oh—" she began hesitatingly.

"I can see," he said. "I got eyes. Yo're different. Yuh think different. Yuh talk different. Yo're educated. I've noticed it. I never had much time for schoolin'."

"That isn't it at all," she told him.

"There y'are. I'd 'a' said 'ain't,' an' yuh know it. I say 'them things', too, an' yuh don't. Yuh can shore make the dictionary sit up an' beg, an' I never could in a million years. Yessir, Dot, all them things is what counts with a girl like yuh, an'——"

"I did hurt your feelin's," she exclaimed contritely. "I know I did. I didn't mean to. Oh, I'm a selfish girl. I—I don't mean to be."

She looked at him with a grieving wistfulness.

"Never think it," he assured her. "Yuh didn't hurt my feelin's, not a smidgin. Yuh can't help bein' educated an' different. But I love yuh, an' I'm gonna show yuh none o' them things count for such a much. What does it matter if I wear a red an' yaller shirt with a pair o' pink pants an' say 'not no' an' 'them is' forty to the minute? What does the like o' that matter if I love yuh so hard I wanna cut the throat of anybody who looks at yuh. What does it now?"

"It does matter—a little. If you really loved me you'd want to do what I—I liked."

"But I do. Lordy, I— Yuh mean to say yuh want me to talk grammar an' not wear funny colors, an'——"

"If you loved me you'd want to."

"If? They ain't no 'ifs'. Never an 'if'. Naw, sir. Here's where I start in goin' easy on the rainbow, but I dunno how I'm gonna teach old words new tricks without yo're round to show me. But yuh'll be round alla time one o' these fine Spring mornin's, so don't let that worry yuh. Honest, I'll swing an' rattle with that dictionary four hours a day if yuh say so. I'll do anythin' bar nothin' to make yuh happy. I'll show yuh. Yuh watch my smoke."

He nodded a confident head and grinned.

"Sometimes I think perhaps you do love me," she said, giving him a troubled look.

"Yo're gonna think so alla time. An', when yuh do, I'm gonna kiss yuh so hard yuh won't be able to breathe for a week."

"Why don't you do it now?" Her black eyes held his gray ones steadily.

"Yuh ain't ready yet. If yuh was, yuh wouldn't ask me no questions."

"You must have had lots of experience," she said, a trifle disconcerted.

"Not me. What li'l' I know I got by hearsay an' mainstring. An' I know better'n to kiss yuh now. I'd spoil everythin' if I did. Yuh needn't look disappointed. 'Cause y'ain't disappointed. Not a bit. Can't fool this orphan child by gogglin' at me under yore eyewinkers either, you sassy rascal."

He bobbed his head at her and patted Juba on his knees.

"Tell yuh somethin' else," he said jerkily, for his hands were thumping furiously, "yo're gonna kiss me first."

"I am?"

"You, Dot Lorimer, are. I done said it."

"You say quite a lot, young man. I don't know when I heard any one talk so much."

" 'Clack, clack,' goes the ol' mill-wheel, huh? Don'tcha care. Better times comin'. I'm goin' home tomorrow. Then you'll be sorry for treatin' me so cruel. Yes, sir, yuh'll shore miss this cowboy. Don't try too hard."

"I'll try not to," she said with a mock sniff, and she bit off a thread with a snap of white teeth.

She held up a mended sock by the toe, shook out the egg-shaped darning-gourd from the heel and laid the sock across her knee. She did not immediately take up another but sat head bent and smoothed and smoothed with deliberate fingers the one on her knee.

Suddenly she raised her head and met Red's eyes. She looked at him gravely.

"Red," said she—they had been Dot and Red to each other for a week—"where did you really find that broken jack-knife and the dime?"

He did not attempt to evade her questioning as he had that of Bill Derr.

"In Farewell," he told her.

"Whereabouts in Farewell?"

"Between the express office an' the company's corral."

"After the robbery or before?"

"After."

"What did you think when you found it?"

"Why—uh—I dunno." He was faltering in his stride.

"It would be natural for you not to think, wouldn't it? Oh, yes, very natural. You know perfectly well you wondered what my father's first initial was. Now be honest. Didn't you? Look at me. There's nothin' of interest for you on the ground and you've seen your feet a million times. Look me in the eye. Didn't you?"

"Maybe I did." He looked her in the eye as ordered, but it was hard work.

"Did you know his name was Benjamin?"

"Not then."

"But you found it out later?"

"Yeah."

"Then you did suspect my father. I know you must have, or you'd have mentioned havin' found a knife with his initials. You needn't shake your head. There was a shred or two of suspicion in your mind. There must have been. Otherwise you wouldn't be human. Oh, I knew. Why do you suppose I cut in when dad was askin' you if you knew his name was Benjamin, if I didn't know? My Lord, you'd have given the whole show away and gotten yourself shot good and plenty if I'd let you go on talkin'. You're not a good liar, Red. You're only fair, and that's almost as bad as tellin' the truth. Sooner or later the only fair liar is caught just as I caught you. Don't look so crestfallen, boy. You can't fool a woman with lies—ever. Remember, Eve ate of the apple before Adam did, and women have been that much ahead of men ever since. I would——"

ABRUPTLY she stopped speaking and looked over the top of Red's hat with slightly narrowed eyes. Red turned a quick head. A man was rounding the corner of the corral. He was coming in their direction. The man was Kansas Casey. He advanced with a smile and took off his hat to the girl.

Red did not smile in return. He replied with a grave "Hello, Kansas," to the other's greeting and watched him alertly. Red could not have named the exact cause—certainly Casey's manner was markedly friendly—yet Red was oppressed with a vague unease, an unease that grew stronger with every breath he drew.

Why had Kansas not let his presence be known before he slid round the corner of the corral? What was his purpose in coming to the ranch-house by stealth? Why all this furtive foxiness? Why?

"Whyfor this Injun business?" inquired Red, cutting straight to the heart of the matter.

"Injun business?" Kansas cocked an eyebrow at Red.

"Shore, Injun business. This driftin' in so soft an' quiet we didn't hear nothin' till yuh stuck yore head round the corner of the corral. Had yuh been waitin' at that corner long?"

This last at a venture, and it seemed to strike the black, for the eyelids of Kansas Casey twitched the least bit.

"What makes yuh think I was waitin' at that corner—long or a-tall?" he asked.

"I was just a-wonderin', thassall," drawled Red. "I wonder a lot now an' then."

"Yeah." Thus Kansas, with a rising inflection.

His smile became quizzical and he looked at Red as one looks at a small child. The tolerance in his expression was as obvious as it was maddening. He held out his hand.

"S'pose you gimme that knife, Red," he suggested, "an' the dime too, while yo're at it."

The deputy's choice of words was unfortunate. Red, already peevish, took instant umbrage.

"An' s'pose I don't do nothin' like that?" Red's drawl became more pronounced.

"Then I'll have to take 'em away from yuh."

The deputy's smile had not vanished. It had grown fixed as set concrete, and his eyes were sharply determined.

Red gave a short hard laugh.

"You'll take 'em away from me?" said he. "You'll take 'em away from me? What makes you think you will?"

"Don't be a fool, Red," urged Kansas. "That knife an' dime are evidence. I'm tryin' to do this peaceable, but I want them two things an' I'm gonna have 'em."

Red hesitated. He knew Kansas was in the right, but Kansas had sneaked up on him, Kansas had rubbed him the wrong way. He felt that Kansas was making him cut a poor figure before his lady. This was vanity. Out of the corner of his eye he stole a quick glance at Miss Lorimer. She was motionless, and she was watching Kansas like a cat. Red thought her face had gone a trifle pale, but he could not be sure, she was so brown.

Red grinned suddenly at Kansas and stuck jaunty thumbs in the armholes of his vest.

"Do yuh want them things now," he asked, "or will yuh wait till yuh get 'em?"

"Stop playin' the fool, Red," admonished Kansas. "This is serious. You don't seem to realize none how serious it is. Shucks, Red, I ain't lookin' for trouble, can'tcha see that? If it was anybody else but you I wouldn't waste my time talkin'. I'd——"

"What would yuh do?" interrupted Red. "I hope yuh wouldn't do nothin' rash. Yuh wouldn't hurt me, would yuh? I might get offended if yuh did."

"Red, you idjit, look yonder," snapped Casey, with a jerk of his thumb toward the ranch-house.

Red looked where he was bidden. On the bench beside the kitchen door sat a lengthy citizen of Farewell, one "Shorty" Rumbold. Shorty's rifle lay across his knees. The barrel was pointing in the general direction of Red Kane and Miss Lorimer.

Red's gaze returned to Kansas Casey.

"Y'oughta know better'n to use Shorty for that," said he. "Yuh know what a poor shot he is. He might hit the lady 'stead o' me."

"He might," put in Kansas softly, "but I won't. S'pose now you keep them thumbs hooked right where they are. I hate to do this, Red, but yo're so mulish I gotta."

Red stared unmoved into the muzzle of Casey's six-shooter.

"I'd like to—" he began.

"He ain't here, Kansas!" called a voice from a window of the ranch-house. "Where's he at?" pursued the voice. "Yore dad—where is he, miss?"

"So that's it, is it?" said Red, glaring at Kansas. "The sheriff's gettin' active, huh? The old coot! Mighty smart, yuh think y'are, don'tcha, a-holdin' us here with yore chatter while the sheriff an' the rest of 'em sifts in an' searches the house, huh? Mighty smart, yes, sir. Who's the stranger? Two strangers—three! What are they hornin' in for?"

Three strangers had followed the sheriff out of the kitchen. For, hearing no reply to his shouted question, the sheriff was coming to close quarters. Red, taking care to keep his thumbs hooked, slowly rose to his feet.

Miss Lorimer did not rise. Deliberately she dropped the sock she had been smoothing into the basket on the ground beside her chair, crossed one unconcerned knee over the other and stifled a yawn with her pretty hand. The yawn brought to a graceful conclusion, she tucked in a loose tendril of hair behind her ear and clasped her hands, right thumb over left, in her lap.

The sheriff, standing in front of the girl, took off his hat to her and achieved a jerky bow. Then he pulled on the hat and coughed. He felt that his task would not be easy. The girl looked too competent by half.

"Where's yore pa, miss?" he asked.

The lady looked up at him sweetly. She smiled charmingly and began to twiddle her thumbs.

"Isn't he in the house?" was her Yankee answer.

"No, he ain't."

"Then he must be out." She stopped revolving her thumbs, lifted one hand and inspected a slim forefinger. "I do believe I broke my nail after all," she observed, quite as if the sheriff and his men were in the next county.

"Nemmine yore nail," Jake Rule said acidly. "I wanna know where yore pa is."

The dark head lifted. She surveyed the sheriff coolly, critically and a little weariedly.

"You'd like to know where my father is," she drawled.

"I said so." There was a note of irritation in the sheriff's tone.

"I heard you say so," she admitted. "You shouted it from the window, didn't you?"

The sheriff swallowed hard. Shorty Rumbold smothered a smile with difficulty.

"Nice weather we're havin'," remarked Red Kane, whom the girl's sheriff-baiting was restoring to good humor. "But maybe it'll rain. What do you think, Kansas?"

His appeal to the deputy was accompanied by a portentous wink.

"Why not introduce yore friends?" continued Red Kane. "I think one of 'em's a sheriff or somethin'. They's the edge o' what looks like a star stickin' out under his vest. Why don't he wear it outside on his vest so's folks can tell he's sheriff? Y'ain't ashamed o' bein' a sheriff, are yuh, mister?"

At the direct question the man addressed frowned upon the jester. He was a consequential-looking person with a self-satisfied mouth and little piggy eyes. There was a fleshiness about his middle that agreed ill with his sheriff's star.

"I wear my star where I please," he said, in a high, thin voice. "I dunno as it's none o' yore business, is it?"

"I dunno as 'tis," replied Red, in a mocking falsetto. "I dunno as 'tis. But then I don't always mind my own business. Sometimes I'll help out other folks with theirs. I ain't proud thataway. Nobody can say I'm proud. Why, feller, I'd even help you out if I thought yuh needed it."

The reedy-voiced sheriff glowered at Red Kane.

"Huh," he grunted. "Huh."

The other two strangers paid no attention to Red. They kept their eyes, sharp eyes, too, fixed on Miss Lorimer. One of these men had a brown and jutting beard and a pony-built body. The other man was clean-shaven with lots of teeth and a curiously twisted nose.

Sheriff Rule shifted his feet impatiently. He wanted to be getting on. Time pressed, and all that sort of thing. And here he was being held up, both actually and to ridicule, by a contumacious girl.

"You'll save trouble by tellin' where yore pa is," he told her.

"Trouble?" she repeated. "What kind of trouble? And for whom? You? Or my father? Or myself?"

"All round, ma'am."

"Oh, all round. That's interestin'. That's very interestin'. Oh, yes indeed. But I don't know that I care to save trouble. Why should I?"

Again the pretty hand concealed a yawn.

The sheriff drew a long breath. The hair at the back of his neck began to bristle. He took a step forward and pointed a long finger at the girl.

"Don't, Red!" cautioned Kansas, for the other had unhooked a thumb.

The thumb crept back into position with reluctance.

"I'm sure the occasion does not call for violence," observed the lady with a sidelong glance at Red. "If the sheriff only knew how silly he looks wavin' his finger at me, why——"

She did not finish the sentence but shrugged her shoulders and twinkled her black eyes at the sheriff. He stepped back, looking foolish, and slapped his hands hard down on his hip-bones.

"Look here, miss, I wanna know where yore dad is. Now you tell me, like a good girl." He licked his wheedling tongue across his lips and nodded his head to encourage her.

" 'Like a good girl.' You talk as if I were three years old and played with tin dishes. You make me tired. I'll tell you what you'd better do, Mister Sheriff. You'd better hoist yourself into the saddle and travel straight back to Nottingham. Because I'll never tell you where Robin Hood is, not if you stay here till Doomsday. So now you know."

" 'Robin Hood,' " repeated the sheriff, his mentality having shed the allusion as a duck sheds water. "I don't know nothin' about Robin Hood. I never said nothin' about him, did I? I wanna know about yore dad, that's all. An' I'm gonna know."

"You won't have no better luck than the sheriff of Nottingham," he was assured by the frankly delighted Red Kane.

"Lemme try my hand," said the stranger sheriff, sidling past Jake Rule. "I'll show yuh how to manage this fool girl."

It was unlucky for the stranger that his sidling brought him within fair armsweep of Red Kane. For the sentence had barely reached its period when Red, risking a shot from Kansas, added his punctuation mark.

"I'll teach yuh!" Red grated between clenched teeth as his hard knuckles flattened the man's nose. "I'll teach yuh how to talk!"

CHAPTER XVIII

AN ACCIDENT?

THE man went down beneath Red's attack with a grunt and a "Whuff!" For Red, while the other was falling, drove his fist into the unguarded stomach. Once the man was flat Red knelt upon the squirming body and whaled away two-handed.

They pried Red off at last, of course. But not before he had appreciably altered the contours of the stranger's face. It must not be supposed that Red was idle while they wrenched him away from his prey. He continued to work fists and feet with whole-hearted enthusiasm to the end that, by the time he lay prostrate and helpless beneath the combined weight of Rule, Kansas and Shorty, every single gentleman present was aware that he had been in a fight.

Especially did the stranger friends of the stranger sheriff realize this. The one with the twisted nose sat on the ground and nursed a knee-cap that had stopped Red's heel. The other was experimenting with a loosened tooth and wondering how soon his left eye would completely close.

"Uncle!" wheezed Red. "Get offa me, will yuh? I ain't no bench! Get off! I said 'Uncle'! How many times yuh want me to say it?"

"Look here, Red," Jake Rule said earnestly. "I don't want no more trouble with you, y'understand. You gimme yore word not to start no more fusses an' I'll let you up. If yuh don't I'll tie you up."

"I'll be good just so long as Snicklefritz there or anybody else o' you chunkers is careful o' their language or don't try to ride me. I won't be good a second longer an' you can gamble on that."

"I'll answer for them other fellers," said the sheriff. "They won't horn in again."

"Then I won't. Lemme get up, will yuh. Howdja guess I'm gonna breathe with yore knee in my stummick? You'd oughta dull up that knee, sheriff. She's too sharp. Kansas, if yo're aimin' to take out a claim on that leg o' mine, would yuh mind movin' higher up? My foot's asleep."

"Better gimme that knife an' the dime before yuh get up, Red," advised the sheriff. "Kansas, did you get his gun?"

"I'm gettin' it now," replied the deputy. "I'm takin' his derringer too."

"Hey, leave my gun be!" bawled Red. "I ain't gonna do nothin' with them guns but I like the feel of 'em on me. Leave 'em alone, Kansas."

"Kansas will take good care o' yore guns," soothed the sheriff. "An' you'll get 'em back before we leave. But just now, Red, you ain't no man to trust with firearms. Not by a jugful you ain't. Yuh needn't try to bite me neither. Yore teeth can't reach. About that knife an' the dime, Red—hand 'em over."

"Shore I will if yuh feel that way about it; that is, if I can pick 'em out o' myself I will. Them things are in a front pocket, an' the longer you sit on me the harder they take root. Nemmine fishin' in my pockets, sheriff, if it's alla same to you. I'll get 'em for yuh myself."

They let him up at that and he handed the broken jack-knife and the dime to Sheriff Rule.

"I s'pose Bill Derr told yuh I had 'em, huh?" hazarded Red, not pleased that his friend should have betrayed him.

"He didn't say nothin' about 'em," said the sheriff. "I wanted to ask him, too, after I heard Calloway's kid gassin' about it, but Bill had went south again. Calloway's kid said yuh wouldn't say where you found 'em. Where didja find 'em, anyway?"

"Calloway's kid is still right," maintained Red, who, finding that he had misjudged Bill Derr, was naturally more ruffled in spirit than ever.

"Are you tryin' to run against the law?" demanded the sheriff.

"Who? Me? Me run against the law? Yo're talkin' foolish. Listen, Jake. Listen hard. I——"

"Better tell him," interrupted the low voice of Miss Lorimer. "There's no sense in being stubborn, Red. You won't gain a thing, not a thing."

"All right," Red said shortly and told the sheriff what he wished to know.

"Between the corral an' the office, huh?" said the sheriff. "That'll be good, that will. Kansas, lemme see that piece o' knife-blade yuh got from Buck Saylor."

The sheriff took the piece of steel from his deputy, opened the jack-knife and placed the broken parts end to end. Red crowded in closer.

"They don't fit," the sheriff said disgustedly.

No more did they. When Red had made the experiment in the Farewell express office they had fitted perfectly.

"That busted-off piece belonged to a bigger knife," averred Red, willing to go that far but no farther.

"Shore," asserted the sheriff. "The busted-off piece is a eighth inch wider an' a mite thicker. An' I was lookin' for a good healthy clue out o' this. Well, maybe somethin' else'll turn up. Kansas, take care o' these here, will yuh? Better wrap 'em up in somethin'. I don't wanna run no risk o' losin' 'em, an' that dime could be special easy lost."

Jake Rule looked over his shoulder at the three strangers. So, with a start, did Red. He had forgotten them for the moment. Which was unwise.

The pig-eyed sheriff, who had regained his wind, had foregathered with his two comrades at one side. They stood, a grumpy trio, and muttered among themselves. Miss Lorimer was unconcernedly darning a sock.

Sheriff Rule went close to her.

"Miss," said he, "I don't wanna have to ask you again where yore pa is."

"Very well, don't," was the tranquil reply. "You won't make me mad."

What was there to be done with such a girl? The sheriff didn't know. He tilted his hat and scratched his perplexed head.

Miss Lorimer laughed and gathered up her socks and darning-basket. She rose to her feet and walked toward the house.

"While you're wonderin' what to do next," she said to the accompaniment of a demure glance at Jake Rule, "suppose you come in and have coffee and doughnuts."

"Doughnuts!" repeated the sheriff, his mouth watering. He had not tasted a doughnut in years. Mrs. Rule was not an all-round cook. "Doughnuts!" he repeated a second time. "That's shore clever of yuh. They'll go good while—while we're waitin', Shorty. Say, Red, nemmine edgin' over toward the corral. You ain't goin' ridin' now. Yo're gonna eat with us."

"I only wanted to look at my hoss," said Red, returning slowly.

"Yeah, I know. But yore hoss is all right. You c'mon in with us."

So saying, the sheriff hooked his arm through Red's and bore him within. Once indoors, Red continued to augment the gaiety of nations.

When the stranger sheriff pulled out a chair and sat down at the table Red immediately kicked back his own chair and stood up. Miss Lorimer was not in the kitchen. She and Kansas had gone out to fill the coffee-pot and fetch firewood. Red would have convoyed the lady, but the sheriff had demurred. He was taking no chances with either of them.

"I'm kind o' partic'lar what I eat with," Red said nastily. "An' I'm free to admit that I think this thing's two friends are skunks too."

"By ——!" exclaimed the first person referred to. "I ain't gonna stand this no longer."

Red leaned across the table and stuck his face within a foot of the other's swollen countenance.

"What are yuh gonna do about it?" he demanded. "I ain't got no gun or I'd shore admire to talk to you proper. But if you'll come outside again I'll do the best I can with my hands an' feet. I'll take yuh two at a time if one o' yore friends wants to chip in. No, by ——, I'll be fair! I'll take the three o' yuh. There y'are. They's a proposition for a reasonable man. Leave yore artillery in here an' the four of us can hop out an' settle our li'l' argument in less'n no time. Whatsa matter? Whadda yuh want me to do? Tie one o' my hands behind my back or somethin'?"

The man with the jutting beard stood up and unbuckled his belt.

"I'll go yuh," he told Red. "I'll tramp on yore guts with both feet, that's what I'll do."

"Naw, yuh won't!" cried Jake Rule, springing to his feet and banging the table with his fist. "They won't be no more fightin' round here for awhile. Sheriff, you sit down. Red, you too."

"I notice," remarked Red, dragging his chair to the wall before sitting down, "I notice that stranger sheriff man didn't even start to get up till after you said they'd be no more fightin', Jake. Is he a friend o' yores?"

"Shut up, Red, will yuh? This ain't no time for jokin'."

"I ain't jokin'," denied Red. "I'm serious as lead in yore innards. I don't wonder yo're ashamed to call him yore friend. I would be, too. Do I have to stay in here, sheriff, an' breathe the same air him an' his two friends are makin' free with? As I done told yuh, Jake, I'm kind o' partic'lar, an' I won't never be contented in the same room with them three tin horns. I wish you'd lemme have my gun for a couple o' minutes. I'd show yuh somethin'."

"Let him have his gun, sheriff," urged the man with the jutting beard. "I'm kind o' curious about this jigger. He may be a ace like he says, an' then again he may be a two-spot. I'd like to find out."

"Yo're brayin' thataway 'cause yuh know he won't gimme my gun!" cried Red in a rage. "Jake," he continued, beseechingly, "I'll give you one hundred dollars for my gun."

"You can't have yore gun till I get good an' ready to give it to yuh," returned the sheriff. "I told yuh so once an' that's enough."

THE stranger sheriff flung a meaningful glance at his two friends. The one with the twisted nose promptly sat back in his chair, stretched his legs out in front of him and, his eyes on the ceiling, began to whistle. The man with the jutting beard resumed his seat, took out a penknife and began to trim his finger nails.

The stranger sheriff slumped sidewise in his chair, put up a right hand and slowly scratched his Adam's apple. Jake Rule turned to look out of the window. At which psychological moment the right hand of the stranger sheriff flipped under his vest. It flipped out again as speedily. There was a flash and a roar and a bluster of smoke and a .45 bullet splintered a round in the back of Red's chair. Red was not in the chair at the time. He had hurled his body to the floor at the first jerk of the other's hand.

Jake Rule whirled round to find Red Kane sitting on the floor and the stranger sheriff wearing a most bewildered expression and looking at a six-shooter that lay on the table in front of him.

"If that ain't the most careless thing I ever done," he said penitently. "Here I go to take the gun out o' my shoulder holster an' my hand slips an' the gun goes off an' —— near shoots the gent sittin' on the floor. Mister Man, I'm shore sorry. I wouldn't 'a' had no accident happen to you for anythin'."

"No," Red remarked with deep feeling. "I guess you wouldn't. I—guess—you—wouldn't. I s'pose now I was lucky to fall out o' my chair."

"Shore you was," said the other, returning the six-shooter to the holster under his armpit. "I dunno when you was ever so lucky."

"See what yore takin' away my gun almost does, Jake!" Red complained bitterly. "If you won't gimme my gun back so's I can take care o' myself, then you keep yore eyes skinned on these sharps. I don't aim to be wiped out."

"It was a accident, Red," said the sheriff, determined to put a good face on the matter.

"Oh, shore. Jake, yo're a damfool, none dammer. Stranger, whyfor didja pull that gun anyway?"

"I wanted to see if she was loaded," was the brazen reply.

"Yuh found out, didn'tcha? Now you listen, Sheriff No-Name. When you'n me meet again you come a-shootin', 'cause I'll be doin' the same."

"I'll try to remember," said the other gravely.

Jake Rule looked doubtfully at the three strangers.

"Shorty," said he, "did you see this—accident?"

"No, sheriff, I didn't. I was a-lookin' out the door. I heard the shot, though, an' I seen the smoke."

"Oh, yuh did," put in Red with sarcastic scorn. "Are you shore?"

"Well—" began Shorty, who was not accustomed to thinking quickly.

"It was a accident, sheriff," the man with the jutting beard asserted smoothly. "I saw the whole thing."

"Shore," supplemented Twisted Nose. "I was lookin' right at the sheriff. Accident! I should say so! This here redheaded gent is shore a-boardin' the wrong hoss when he says different."

"Meanin' I'm a liar, huh?" rapped out Red, the allusion to his hair adding fresh fuel to the blaze of his wrath. "Aw right, what I told yore sheriff friend goes for you too."

"Why leave me out?" asked Jutting Beard.

"We aim to please, feller. Yo're welcome to help yore two friends all you like. Come a-runnin', the lot o' yuh. You——"

"What's the matter? Who's shot? Who—" Miss Lorimer, followed by Kansas Casey, darted into the kitchen and stood panting, her black eyes fixed anxiously on Red Kane.

"It's all right," replied Red easily. "Gent got a li'l' careless, thassall. Nobody hurt."

"Oh," murmured Miss Lorimer. "Oh—I see. Mr. Casey, I left the coffee-pot at the spring. Will you get it? I think I'm needed right here in this kitchen."

CHAPTER XIX

RIDIN' 'EM

"WHY don't you come sit at the table with the others, Red?" asked Miss Lorimer, looking up from filling the cup of Sheriff Rule.

"I don't eat with no polecats," was the reply. "Meanin' no offence to Jake, Kansas or Shorty."

"Lord," said Miss Lorimer with a slight laugh, "if I can serve these three individuals—and I know a lot about them too—you shouldn't object to eatin' with them."

"You know 'em!" Red looked his astonishment.

"I know 'em from way back and they know me. You can't tell me anythin' about this bunch. Compared to them, Ananias told the truth and Judas was the soul of honor. They're so crooked they make a corkscrew look like the shortest distance between two points. Let me tell you about them."

"Ma'am," broke in Jake Rule, "it ain't necessary. I know this gentleman is Mister Tom Lumley, the sheriff of Rock County, Colorado, an' these other gents are Mister Rouse an' Mister Bruff, his two deputies. What more——"

"There's a lot more," interrupted the lady. "You've no idea how much, really. Oh, it's no bother, sheriff. I don't mind tellin' you. In fact, I'd rather enjoy it. What's the matter, Mr. Lumley? Isn't that chair comfortable? You're not goin' outside, are you, Billy Bruff? You're gettin' shy all of a sudden, aren't you? Surely you can't be afraid of what a girl says, Dunc Rouse. I know you never seemed to mind when 'Sniff' O'Neill's wife used to come to your saloon and beg you not to let Sniff gamble in your place. And you used to get Sniff drunk so he would. Sniff's baby died at Christmas and Sniff's little girl went out when Spring came. It must have been a hard Winter in the O'Neill family. I often wonder if Sniff's wife cursed you before she died."

The man with the twisted nose scraped the floor with an uneasy heel and violently stirred his coffee. He licked his lips and took a long and noisy drink. He set down the cup, wiped his mouth on the back of his hand, looked everywhere save in Miss Lorimer's direction and began to build himself a cigaret.

Miss Lorimer kept her eyes upon him. She leaned against the back of a chair and nodded her head with satisfaction.

"They say a dyin' person's curse always comes true," she went on. "Is that why your hand's tremblin', Dunc?"

"Ain't tremblin'!" snapped the twisty-nose man. "What I care for you?"

"You don't have to burn your nose in order to show your indifference," she told him, for Dunc, in his confusion, had held the match where he shouldn't. "You killed Sniff, didn't you? Self-defense was the excuse you gave. Nobody saw the killin' except Tom Lumley. Self-defense! And Sniff shot plumb through the back with a shotgun! When your time comes, Dunc, the devil will certainly talk to you. Poor Sniff! I never could understand why you shot him. He was so sort of harmless and helpless I always felt sorry for him. You swore he hit you, though—or was it a kick? Oh, the nasty bad canary bird snapped at Dunc, so it did, and Dunc had to kill it, didn't he?"

Twisty Nose glowered at Miss Lorimer and muttered under his breath.

"Say it out loud," smiled Miss Lorimer. "I'd enjoy hearin' what you really think of me."

Warm-tempered Red crouched and gathered himself. Another fight was imminent. But Twisty Nose choked down the words he burningly desired to utter. His eyes glowed with sullen fire.

"Ma'am," said badgered Sheriff Rule, "I'd take it as a favor if you wouldn't talk no more."

"You'd take it as a favor, would you? You'd take it as a favor. I don't know that I owe you any favors. Whose house is this, anyway? Did I ask you here? I guess I can talk if I want to. I don't see anybody around here that's able to stop me."

"No, ma'am, no. Only I— You shut up now, ma'am, please."

"Why don't you gag me then, if you don't want to listen. Because I've got more to say—quite a lot more. I haven't mentioned the other two rascals yet. Of course, I know they ought to be in jail, but you don't, I imagine."

"Yo're a fine one to talk about jails," slipped in Sheriff Lumley. "You wait till we get our paws on yore pa. You won't talk so fast about jails. An' besides, you can't prove nothin' against me, an' you know it. I've been elected three terms, an' I guess now that shows what kind o' standin' I got."

"It shows you bought every election," flashed the girl. "You an' your gang of thieves have run Rock County for years. Who was it stole the Gov'ment beef contracts away from the Rafter O? Who was it switched five thousand sacks of flour on the Round Mountain Indians and gave 'em middlin's? And sour middlin's at that. Who——"

"I never!" interrupted Lumley shrilly. "I didn't——"

"Who said you did?" queried Miss Lorimer.

Lumley subsided. Red Kane laughed.

"Lord, Tom Lumley," swept on Miss Lorimer. "I thought you had more sense than to be caught by a trick like that. And you call yourself a sheriff! I suppose you'll admit now you used to bootleg the Round Mountain Reservation, you and the agent, and run brace games besides for the Indians. Not content with stealin' their grub you'd rustle their money. That's playin' both ends against the middle, I guess.

"I always believed you had a hand in killin' Sniff O'Neill, too. Dunc Rouse wouldn't have done it if you hadn't put him up to it. You held the mortgage on Sniff's little bunch o' cattle, didn't you? And Sniff's wife said Sniff left home with the money to pay off the mortgage and not two hours later he was found dead in your office? The money? What money? Mister Sheriff Lumley rolls his eyes and swears he knows nothing of any money. He had seen no money. Certainly not. The mortgage? We-ell, of course, it's too bad, tough on Mrs. O'Neill, but business is business, and Mister Sheriff Lumley took the cows. It was two days later that Mrs. O'Neill cut her throat in front of your house. When they picked her up one of her hands was resting on your doorsill and that flat stone you used for a doorstep was dyed red.

"You took the flat stone away after that, didn't you? The red wouldn't wash out, would it? Yes, Tommy, I expect she cursed you all right. That's why she committed suicide on your doorstep. And I don't believe you'll get rid of the curse as easily as you got rid of the flat stone, either. Do you ever have nightmare, Tom?"

Sheriff Lumley's Adam's apple worked up and down a time or two. Then he laughed harshly, raggedly.

"Try again, Tom," urged Miss Lorimer. "That laugh had a crack in it."

"You can't scare me," he told her.

"I wasn't tryin' to," said she. "Look at Dunc."

The entire roomful looked at Dunc. That twisty-nosed person was noticeably pale about the lips. His eyes were glassily bright. He was constructing a cigaret and making heavy weather of it. Tobacco and torn papers littered the table in front of him. Even as the man felt the many pairs of eyes fasten upon him his shaking fingers split in two the cigaret they held.

Miss Lorimer laughed. There was no crack in her laugh. It was clear and ringing as her voice when she said—

"You should have educated Dunc to stand ridin' better'n that, Tommy."

Sheriff Lumley turned hard eyes from Dunc Rouse to Sheriff Rule. He saw no help there. His gaze slid back in the direction of Miss Lorimer, passed her and came to rest on the empty coffee cup in front of him. Ostentatiously he rattled the spoon in the cup.

"Any coffee left," he grunted.

"I'm makin' some more," said the girl. "Give the water a chance to boil, can't you?"

RED KANE looked at the stove. His forehead puckered. Plainly he was searching for an elusive thought. Whatever the thought, it remained elusive for the moment.

Miss Lorimer smiled and looked upon Billy Bruff with speculation in her eye. The gentleman with the jutting beard avoided her stare. It might almost be said that he dodged it. But all to no purpose.

"Have you still got that horse you stole from the Two Bars?" inquired Miss Lorimer to the accompaniment of rattling stove-lids as she put in more wood.

"I dunno what yo're talkin' about," averred Billy Bruff.

"Of course you don't. How silly of me. I don't mean the horse. I mean the horses. Twenty-four of them, weren't there? At least the Two Bars went shy that many. You ran 'em off one moonlight night, hair-branded 'em and sold them to Cram and Docket over in Piegan City. Wasn't that the way of it? I heard so, at least."

"You heard wrong." Mr. Bruff's tone was most emphatic.

"Funny. My hearin's fine. A Number One. I heard somethin' else, too, William. They say Bruff isn't your real name at all—that it used to be Smith or Jones over west where you came from—California, wasn't it?"

"I never been west o' the Bitter Roots," said Mr. Bruff.

"No?" And oh, her voice was honey sweet. "No? Were you ever at Fort Rackham, Idaho?"

"No!"

"You didn't have anythin' to do with the shootin' of the post trader there, did you? No, of course not. How could you if you were never in Idaho? And, if you were never in Idaho, you couldn't possibly have deserted from the Third Cavalry when it was stationed at Fort Rackham. You don't know that five troops of the Third are stationed at Fort Yardley now, do you?"

Billy Bruff's eyes flickered in spite of himself. But his voice was steady enough as he said:

"Whadda I care about the Third Cavalry or any other cavalry? I never was in the Army. I think yo're talkin' like a—" He failed to complete the sentence.

"Go on," she nodded. " 'Like a what?' "

"I don't call no women names," was the reply.

Red's tense frame relaxed.

"That's right noble of you, Bill," said Miss Lorimer with a scornful lift of her upper lip. "I didn't think you had it in you. How much were you paid to kill the post trader?"

"She's crazy," declared Billy Bruff. "Crazy's a June bug."

"Am I? We'll see. Suppose I drop a word to the commandin' officer at Yardley that Sam Reynolds, sergeant in K troop, who deserted at Fort Rackham, is a deputy sheriff in Rock County, Colorado. What then, my bouncin' boy, what then?"

"Fly at it," said Billy Bruff.

Red looked hard at the man. There was a restless, uneasy aspect about him. To be sure there was. No doubt of it. To Red's mind Billy Bruff appeared positively hang-dog. But it is to be feared that Red was prejudiced somewhat. Prejudiced or not, Red felt an overpowering urge to say what he thought.

"I'll bet you was a Long Knife all right," he observed. "An' desertin' is just what you would do, y'betcha."

"Yo're a liar," declared the sunny-tempered Bill. "Yo're a liar by the clock."

"Callin' me a liar once was enough. I heard yuh the first time. I'm sorry once more I ain't got no gun. But I'll be havin' a gun after a while, an' then maybe you'n' me can argue it out. We was goin' to, anyway, wasn't we?"

"Kind o' forgot that, huh?" sneered Billy Bruff.

"No-o," drawled Red, "I didn't forget it. I got a right good memory—a right good memory. I can remember word for word just about everythin' I heard here this afternoon. An' I won't forget none of it neither. I'll stuff her down in the li'l' ol' memory all same salt in a bag an' maybe some day it'll all come in useful. Yuh can't tell. Yo're bein' a deserter now. That's mighty interestin'. I dunno when I heard anythin' to make me sit up an' take notice so much as that. An' yore killin' the post trader, too.

"Tell by yore face yo're some brand o' criminal. I seen a hoss-thief hung once, an' he looked like yuh. An' I seen a murderer lynched—killed a woman, he did—an' he looked like yuh. Then they was Bert Kenny right in our own home town. He was a tin horn—skin yuh out o' two-bits. Yeah, he was that cheap. He tried to rob Mike Flynn's store one night an' Mike gave him both barrels of a Greener loaded with buckshot. An' he looked like yuh—before he was shot. Them buckshot sort o' mussed his features after. Don't you see the resemblance to Bert, Kansas? Same shifty li'l' eyes, set close like a hawg's, same no-count turn-up nose, same funny-lookin' frowsy set o' whiskers, same stick-out an' stick-up ears an' same—open yore mouth, feller. I wanna see if yore teeth are like Bert's."

"F'r a thin dime—" began Billy Bruff.

"You'd slit my gizzard," supplied Red Kane. "I know yuh'd like to. But we was talkin' about Bert Kenny. He used to drum nervous on a table with his fingers like yo're doin' now. Whatcha stop for? I don't mind. An' he used to work his jaw-muscles in an' out like yo're doin' too. An' stingy! Lordy, feller, Bert was so stingy he couldn't unbutton his shirt. An' mean! Honest, I guess this Bert Kenny even hated himself. Kind o' tough he had to go an' get shot, 'cause you 'n' him would 'a' got along together great. Yo're so much alike."

"In a minute you'll be sayin' I was shot like this Bert Kenny," said Billy Bruff contemptuously.

"I won't be sayin' that yet," smiled Red. "But I hope to later. I shore would like to dirty up clean lead in you."

"Ain't you runnin' up quite a bill, young feller?" Sheriff Lumley cut in with feline scorn.

"An' how long have you been out o' jail?" flashed the retort courteous. "An' who gave you license to horn in on my conversation? S'pose I am talkin' to a polecat; you keep still. When I get ready to talk to you I'll let yuh know, sport, I'll let you know. Lordy, here comes 'Telescope' Laguerre, Loudon an' Tom. I wonder what they want?"

WHATEVER the three wanted they obviously wanted it in a hurry. Their right arms were quirting incessantly. Tom Kane was working his quirt cross-handed. The three horses were racing like frightened deer.

Thuddy-thud, thuddy-thud, they tore in between the corral and the ranch-house and slowed to a sliding halt in front of the kitchen door. Tom Kane was first through the doorway.

"He—" he began. "Shucks!" he finished, out of deference to Miss Lorimer, and slid his revolver back into the holster. "I didn't know it was the sheriff. When Riley told me he seen a bunch o' riders headin' this way, I just cinched a hull on the li'l' hoss, picked up Telescope an' Loudon down at Bill Lainey's an' come a-runnin'. I thought shore the 88 would be here," he added disappointedly, looking about him as if he half expected an 88 adherent to pop out from a place of concealment.

"I'm sorry they ain't here, Tom," said Red. "But these three gents are almost as good." He indicated with a sweep of his thumb Sheriff Lumley and his two friends. "They been amusin' us a lot," he went on. "I seen a monkey eatin' peanuts once, but these jiggers are funnier'n than that."

"Yeah," said Tom, who, quick to take a cue, was eying with lively interest the three providers of entertainment. "Can they do tricks?"

Telescope Laguerre and Mr. Saltoun's son-in-law and foreman, Tom Loudon, nodded gravely to the men they knew and took off their hats to Miss Lorimer. Loudon winked at Red Kane. The latter stuck his tongue in his cheek and winked back.

"I dunno who you are," Sheriff Lumley said to Tom Kane, "but if you want trouble here is where it's made."

"I've heard talk like that before—lots o' times," Tom told him. "I ain't dead yet."

"You will be if you start gettin' smoky, Tom," hastily nipped in Jake Rule. "You wasn't here when I said they ain't gonna be no fightin' round this shack today. You know me, an' I'm tellin' all you gents if they's any shootin' to be done I'll do it, an' I'll do it first."

"Which is good English an' can be understood by most any one," confirmed Tom. "But I wasn't thinkin' o' nothin' like that. I'm here to help out Red, thassall. What's happened to yore gun, Red?"

"Ask the sheriff." Red nodded toward Jake Rule.

"He'll get it back later," said Jake. "But he—he got gay an' I hadda take it away from him."

Involuntarily Jake's eyes wandered in the direction of Sheriff Lumley. Tom Kane's eyes followed the other's glance.

"I was wonderin' what happened to the fat feller's face," Tom observed with delight. "An' that other feller's got a right black eye. He don't look like he could see out of it none. Didn't you have no help a-tall, Red?"

"Not a smidgin. Done it all myself. I'd 'a' done a better job only Jake an' Kansas an' Shorty stopped me before I'd more'n begun. They're willin'—the three sharps, I mean—to shoot it out some other time."

"They're willin', huh? That's good. What? The three of 'em against you alone? Now that's what I call real generous. They's nothin' mean about them. Oh, no. But I'm in on this deal, too, an' don'tcha forget it."

"I'm goin' outside," snarled Billy Bruff. "They's too many folks in here to suit me."

"Yo're right," answered Tom Kane. "I'll go out with you."

But Sheriff Rule had something to say to that. Members of opposing factions could not walk abroad together. Billy Bruff went out alone.

Within sixty seconds he returned on the jump.

"She's signalin'!" he bawled insanely, pointing at Miss Lorimer. "She's signalin' with smoke from that stove!"

"Did you just find it out?" queried Miss Lorimer as she sank into the chair vacated by Red. "You purblind idiot," she continued, tilting back against the wall and hooking her heels on a rung. "I've been signalin' ever since I lit the fire. You see, the breeze dropped after you arrived. I asked you in for coffee soon's I noticed it. Dad's miles away by this time. Oh, miles and miles. Clever, wasn't I?"

She clasped her hands behind her pretty head and laughed up into the dismayed faces belonging to Law and Order.

"Done!" yelped Tom Kane and slapped his knee. "Done by a girl! Ain't you the bright lads?"

"And you never guessed why I talked so much, did you?" smiled Miss Lorimer. "I suppose you thought I was telling you about yourselves just for fun. That would have been foolish. I wouldn't waste my breath. You backed me up wonderfully with your talkin'," she appended to Red's address. "I didn't think you'd catch on."

"I didn't," he acknowledged, "till I seen yuh put on green wood an' a hunk o' sod the third time. Then I knowed. Lordy, Jake, don't look so sad. This ain't the first time you been razzledazzled, is it?"

"Nor it won't be the last," contributed Tom. "Jake, the drinks are on you."

To judge by their expressions the drinks were on the Rock County gentlemen likewise. There was black murder in the three pairs of eyes riveted on Miss Lorimer.

Red rose and stood in front of her. Seeing which, Tom sidled up and added his lean bulk to the barrier.

"Might's well go back, I s'pose," suggested Shorty Rumbold.

"No," decided Jake Rule, "we'll wait here till tomorrow mornin'. Maybe them signals wasn't seen."

"Don't lose any sleep over those signals not bein' seen," said Miss Lorimer. "They were, never doubt it. If you want to stay, stay by all means. But would you mind sendin' Lumley and his friends outside? Now that I'm through usin' 'em I don't want 'em in my kitchen any longer."

"Plenty o' time," said Lumley, hitching his chair close to the table. "Plenty o' time, girl. S'pose yore father has sloped; I guess now he didn't take the money with him. You can tell us where that is an' maybe we won't arrest you."

"Maybe?" sneered Red. "Did I hear you say 'maybe'? I did hear you say 'maybe.' Tom, I don't believe he means it. I don't believe he means that 'arrest' word neither. Whadda you guess?"

"I guess yo're right," declared the pugnacious Tom.

"If I decide to arrest her as a witness, I guess it'll be all right," averred Jake Rule.

"Shore it will—if you decide to," declared Red cheerfully. "But you ain't gonna decide to. You ain't got no warrant for her, have yuh?"

"I ain't," admitted Jake. "But——"

"Then they ain't no 'buts,' Jake, nary a 'but.' Naw, sir. Lordy, man, you ain't gonna arrest a lady just 'cause this mangy dog of a Rock County sheriff wants yuh to, are yuh? Since when have you been niggerin' for him?"

This was the ancient game of beclouding the issue, but it worked as the old games do at times. Besides, Sheriff Rule was losing his erstwhile liking for the Rock County officers. What Miss Lorimer had said concerning their pasts was having its effect.

"I'll bet you ain't even got a warrant for Lorimer neither," said Red, pursuing his advantage.

"Wrong there," contradicted Jake Rule. "They's a warrant for Lorimer all right, all legal an' correct."

"Lumley brought it, huh?"

"Yep."

"I dunno as you said what Lorimer's wanted for."

"Murder—murder an' robbery," Lumley answered for the other sheriff and smacked his fat lips spitefully.

"Which one o' yore friends really done it, Lumley?" Red drawled in a soft and gentle voice.

"We'll get this Lorimer gent—which his real name's Lenton," sneered Lumley by way of reply, "an' we'll hang him good an' plenty for all yo're so smart."

"You do gimme credit for somethin', don'tcha?" cried Red happily. "I knowed you'd get on to me after a while. I just knowed it. Here's another thing before I forget it: Mr. Lorimer or Lenton never committed no murder or robbery neither. Naw, sir, not he."

"If her dad ain't a murderer, whyfor did she signal him then?" demanded Jake Rule shrewdly.

Red hadn't thought of this. It was a facer, rather. Nevertheless, he opened his mouth to cry Jake down, but the girl squeezed his elbow warningly before the first word was out.

"Shut up," she whispered and stepped past him to face Jake Rule. "I'll tell you why I signaled to my father," she went on, speaking rapidly. "I signaled him because if he's arrested he'll be hung for a crime he never committed. The money he took belonged to him. How can a man rob himself?"

"It was his brother's money!" broke in Sheriff Lumley. "An' he killed his own brother, Dick Lenton, to get it."

"That's a lie and you know it. He only took his own share. He—we were miles away when Uncle Dick was killed."

"Maybe you can prove it," Lumley suggested waspishly.

"A fine chance we'd have of provin' anythin' down in Rock County, with you and your gang ready and able to swear black's green till all's blue. Dad hasn't a chance and he knows it. You've had it in for him ever since he told you to your filthy, lyin' face what particular kind of hound-dog you were. You haven't nerve enough to come out in the open and fight like a two-legged he-man. No, not you; you'll sneak and slime and scheme round in the dark when folks aren't lookin' till you think everythin's safe, and then you'll drive your skinnin'-knife home right between the shoulder-blades. But you've missed it this time. You'll never get my dad. You'll never take him back to Rock County to swear his life away. Mark what I say, Tom Lumley. You'll kick the wind while he's still well and hearty."

She took a step toward him, her arm outstretched, and he fell back before her pointed finger.

"I tell you," she pursued, her black eyes blazing, two bright spots of pink hot on her cheeks, "I tell you, if anybody knows who killed Uncle Dick, you know, and I wouldn't be surprized if you were the man that killed him."

"Look here—" began Tom Lumley furiously.

"Never mind. I don't want to hear another word from you. I've listened to you long enough. Get, and get quick."

"I'll go when I get good and ready," was his countercheck quarrelsome.

"Yo're ready now," Red Kane told him flatly, one long stride bringing him breast to breast with Tom Lumley. "Pick up yore feet an' stagger out through the door where you can keep company with the other animals. Flit!"

Tom Lumley tried hard to look down those inexorable gray eyes. But he wasn't man enough. Twice sixty seconds—his gaze shifted, veered back, wandered away again and remained away. Tom Lumley shook his shoulders and turned toward the door.

"I don't want no trouble—now," he said and went out.

CHAPTER XX

LUMLEY'S LAUGH

"LORDY, Dot, you don't need to tell us nothin'," said Red.

"I want to," she declared, sitting down on the bench outside the kitchen door. "You'd much better hear it from me than from some one else."

She crossed her feet and leaned forward, her clasped hands between her knees. Her profile, dark and clean cut, was in full silhouette against the sunset's orange-tawny.

Red Kane, sitting on the other end of the same bench, drew a long breath. It must be said that he was thinking more of her profile than of what she was saying.

"I—I—don't know where to begin," she hesitated.

"Thassall right, Dot," said Red, his eyes on that alluring profile. "Lean forward a li'l' more, will yuh?"

"Wha—what?" She turned her head quickly.

"Nothin'," he told her hastily, jerking his shoulder away from his brother's pinching fingers. "I—I was afraid you was gonna fall off the bench."

"Is that why your brother's tryin' to kick you?" she asked slowly.

"No, no; that's only Tom's way. You musn't mind him. He—he don't mean nothin'. He's always devilin' me. Some day I'm gonna make him hard to find. Yessir, I'll just naturally have to crawl his hump real savage."

"Idjit!" The epithet was uttered in a fierce whisper as Tom jabbed Red in the ribs with stiffened thumb. "Move over."

Red obeyed. Tom dropped down beside him and trod heavily on his instep in the process.

"You stop it." Again the whisper in Red's ear. "You gotta stop admirin' her while I'm here any— Ugh!"

For Red had kicked back. Tom at once tucked his legs out of range and surreptitiously fondled a dented shin.

"You see," said the girl, "my father's real name is Benjamin Lenton. We—my father and his brother Dick—owned the Empire mine near Flipup, Rock County, Colorado. It's not a big mine, but there's money in it for energetic men. Dad's active enough, Heaven knows, but Uncle Dick was lazier than Ludlam's dog, and he was so lazy he used to lean his head against a wall to bark.

"We worked the mine; that is, father did, and I helped, while Uncle Dick lay down in the traces and spent most of his time in Flipup—interestin' capital, he called it. Capital! All the capital you'd find in Flipup you could stick in your eye. We didn't need money, anyway. All the Empire needed was picks and shovels and the arms to use 'em. Dunc Rouse's place was Uncle Dick's favorite hangout. He and Dunc were about as thick as a saloon-keeper and a customer ever get to be. Billy Bruff, Sheriff Lumley and a man named Usher weren't far behind Dunc in friendliness toward Uncle Dick.

"Mind you, I'm not runnin' down Uncle Dick. I'm simply tellin' the truth about him. There was absolutely no harm in the man. He was just weak, besides bein' a natural-born fool and a gambler. Lord, cards weren't a passion with him. They were a disease.

"Dad never said much to Uncle Dick. He held it wasn't any of his business what he did. It was his own money he was wastin', and by-and-by he'd wade in and do his share. But I knew better. So long's he was allowed to loaf, he'd loaf. And it used to make me mad, because I was doin' Uncle Dick's work.

"I'd ask pa to make him hold up his end of the log, but that's all the good it ever did. Dad never would be firm about it. He always was easy-goin' that way. I'm built differently, and I got good and tired of packin' ore while Uncle Dick shuffled the pasteboards with his rapscallion friends. I used to lay Uncle Dick out regularly whenever he'd come home for supper. It got so that after a while he didn't come home to supper. Then he took to stayin' out all night. I didn't mind that. It made one less to bother about.

"Maybe I wasn't wise to nag at him all the time. I don't know. I might better have kept my mouth shut. Because one day Uncle Dick came home and said he was tired of bein' yelled at by his own niece, and he wasn't goin' to stand it any longer, he wasn't, and he was goin' to sell the mine, he was.

"Father objected to that, of course. He'd no fault to find with the Empire. Uncle Dick could sell his share of the mine if he wanted to, but as for himself, he'd hang on, thank you.

"That wouldn't do at all, accordin' to Uncle Dick. The parties who wanted the mine wanted all or nothin'. 'Nothin', then, is what they'll get,' said my dad. Which didn't suit Uncle Dick, naturally. He wasn't real drunk at the time, I remember—about one foot in the stirrup and the other draggin'—but he'd had sufficient to make him persistent—persistent and stubborn. He was all mule that night, Uncle Dick.

"Well, he and pa had it hot and heavy, back and forth. One would and t'other wouldn't till you couldn't hear yourself think. I went out to the corral. It was too noisy for me.

"Next mornin' dad told me he'd agreed to sell his share of the Empire. The buyers were Lumley, Dunc Rouse, Usher and Billy Bruff and the price was sixty thousand dollars in gold. Dad was set on that point—the money in gold. And the buyers didn't object.

"They got the money from Piegan City, and the bill of sale was signed and payment made at Usher's warehouse in Flipup. This Usher was a money-lender with two saloons and a gambling-house as a side-line, and he had made the necessary arrangements about the gold.

"We brought the money out to our house at the mine that evenin'—we expected to go on livin' there, dad and I did—and Uncle Dick brought a bottle home with him. Celebratin', he called it. He celebrated, all right.

"First off he began to argue about the sale. Said we should have waited a while longer. And he was the one that started the sale talk in the very beginnin', mind you. From this he went on to say that half was too much for dad. A third was plenty. Hadn't he—Uncle Dick—engineered the sale and done all the brain work? Dad didn't say anythin' at first—just sat there lookin' at his brother. Which didn't help to cool off Uncle Dick any. He kept right on headin' toward his finish. He finally said a fourth was plenty for anybody who'd only handled the pick and shovel end of it and that made me wild.

"There were callouses on the palms of my hands as thick as sole leather and I'd worn out enough pairs of overalls to stock a store. I was hoppin' mad, and I talked to Uncle Dick and he called me names—he was pretty drunk by that time—and dad knocked him down flat on his back. Then Uncle Dick got the shotgun out of the corner and tried to shoot dad. And dad took the gun away from him and knocked him down again and broke his nose and some of his front teeth.

"Even then Uncle Dick wasn't satisfied, and he picked up a kitchen knife and went for dad again. Then dad lost his temper, and he bent his gun over Uncle Dick's head and slammed him senseless down in under the table. When Uncle Dick came to after a while he was pretty sick and he looked it. He sat up, holdin' his head in his hands and groanin' and sayin' he'd been misunderstood all his life and he'd never meant any harm. And the buckshot he let fly at dad didn't miss by more'n two inches!

" 'That's all right,' pa told him. 'You'n' me are through. We split now this minute. You can have the house and one-half the money. I'll take the other half and half the horses and wagons and drag it.'

" 'You can't go too quick or too fast for me,' said Uncle Dick, fetchin' another groan and pickin' out a loose tooth from under his tongue. 'But all the same,' said Uncle Dick, 'a third o' that money is all you rightly deserve.' Dad didn't say anythin', just kept on dividin' the gold half and half. When it was all even Steven in two piles he told Uncle Dick to count it, and Uncle Dick did. Bein' still mellow, although a lot soberer than he was at first, it took him a long time. He got it over with at last and tucked his thirty thousand away in the oven, still grumblin' that it wasn't fair and he should have had two-thirds. Then he sat down on the floor all bloody as he was, braced his back against the oven-door and went to sleep.

"We loaded our share of the household belongin's into the wagons, caught up the horses and pulled out, leavin' Uncle Dick snorin'. We followed the Seymour trail intendin' to go over to the country north of Piegan City later.

"Next evenin', not more'n half an hour

after we'd thrown down for the night, Sam Wylie, one of our Flipup friends, came peltin' up and said Uncle Dick had been murdered. When the four owners of the mine rode out to take possession that mornin' Lumley wanted a drink and went to the house. There was Uncle Dick shot to death, lyin' on the kitchen floor. There was no sign of any money anywhere, and Uncle Dick's three-diamond ring that he paid a gambler a thousand dollars for in Cheyenne was gone, and Lumley and the others were talkin' of dad as the thief and murderer. Sam said they were makin' out a warrant when he left to warn us.

"Well, it did look suspicious, you can see that—our leavin' an' all. We knew that if dad was arrested he wouldn't have any show. The sheriff, who didn't like him anyway, would be sure to make an example of him. It was too good a chance to miss—rid himself of an enemy and make a record at one fell swoop.

"We talked it over, dad and I, and we decided our best move was to run. We didn't like the idea exactly, but it was better than havin' dad hung; so we left the wagons standin' and rode off into the mountains. We took all the horses with us, naturally, and we certainly made a lot of trail for the next month. At the end of that time we were down in the Nation. We stayed there a couple of months, livin' under the name of Lorimer, and then moved on into Texas. We lived a while in Goliad County and then drifted west again to Agua Seca Ranch near the White Sands in New Mexico.

"We hung round there a spell and wound up the year with four months at Lincoln, where pa bought out a little store and tried to settle down. But it was no go. He didn't like keepin' store—a miner never does, as a rule. So we pulled our freight again, this time with wagons, expectin' to nester somewhere. We finally reached this place an—and that's all, I guess."

MISS LENTON looked down at the clasped hands between her knees. Then she raised her head and faced Red and his brother. Her face showed gray and hazy in the dusk.

"Well," she said in a low voice, "what do you think of it all?"

"I think them four gents," averred Red Kane emphatically, "Lumley, Bruff, Rouse an' Usher are in this murder deal up to their belts. Thirty thousand dollars in the stove an' Lumley was the man to find it. It was a pick-up for him, a pick-up. He couldn't 'a' ordered it better. Naw, sir. No sign o' the money anywhere an' yore father blamed instanter. Shore he would be."

"You think he should have given himself up?" asked Miss Lenton.

"Lordy, no, I should say not. He done the best thing he could do under the circumstances. But them was bad circumstances an' mighty black-lookin'. They wasn't no witnesses but you to the quarrel between yore pa an' yore uncle?"

"I was the only other person within two miles, I guess."

"Shore; an' what was yore uncle shot with?"

"Sam Wylie said with the shotgun. Father had left that as part of Uncle Dick's share, you see."

"Shot with the family shotgun, Dot, makes it worse, if anythin'. Them fellers shore are holdin' four aces an' the joker."

"I know it," the girl said. "It—it—Oh, it's awful. Nun-now we've got to go on the road again. And I did so want to settle down. It's not good for dad to be continually on the move."

"He'll have to be unless this deal's fixed up," said Red soberly.

"If he surrenders and stands his trial, he'll——"

"I know," nodded Red. "I ain't wantin' him to give himself up, not for a minute. But this traipsin' round can't go on. Some day they'll come up on him again like they done here an' maybe the next time they'll rope him good. Ain't that the way you see it, Tom?"

"Shore," assented Tom. "They's only one thing to do—catch the real murderer."

"An' till he is caught, Dot, yore pa won't never be safe—never. Why, for that thirty thousand dollars they'd follow him for forty years. It's the money really."

"How're you goin' to fix it up, then? It's all very well to say, 'Catch the real murderer.' How're you goin' to catch him? And who's goin' to catch him?"

"Who? That's easy. I'm the answer."

"You?"

"Me."

"But——"

"But why not? I'm free, white an'

twenty-one. I got all the growth I'll ever get. An' I ain't busy right now. What more do yuh want? Dot, I'm just the feller to go down there to Rock County an' reform it a few. From what you say an' from what I've seen o' the sheriff an' his outfit, I guess reformin' wouldn't hurt 'em none. Tom'll go with me. Huh, Tom?"

"Yeah," said Tom without hesitation. "You bet I'll go. You'll need somebody to bury yuh likely an' it might as well be me."

"You'll never put me to bed with a shovel, old settler. Never think it. There may be buryin' done—you can't always tell what'll happen on a job like this—but the both of us'll do the diggin'. Lordy, Dot, don't look thataway. Tom don't mean nothin', the poor fool. He's never happy without he's pullin' a long face an' grumblin' what a rough old world she is. So don't you mind him, 'cause I don't. Lookit, they must be a few straight gents in Rock County. They can't all be like Lumley's bunch. They's this Sam Wylie, f'rinstance, an' who else?"

"The two Davis boys—they run the California store in Flipup—and Bill Stringer and 'Pike County' Bowers were dad's friends and the only ones in Flipup I'd be absolutely sure of. There are other honest men in the county itself but they're not organized—and I don't know who they are, anyway."

"Maybe we can find out. Listen, Dot, all them things you said to these fellers—can they be proved?"

"I don't know. Every bit of what I said I'd worked out from dribs and drabs of gossip let fall by Uncle Dick when he'd come home drunk and spend the evenin' with a bottle. But there was somethin' in it all—you could tell as much by the way they acted. Bruff held the steadiest of the three, but did you notice his eyes when I said the Third Cavalry was at Fort Yardley?"

"Shore. Guess he didn't know that regiment's back east at Fort Snelling."

"Neither did I. I wish it was nearer. However, if we can't use the desertion charge, there are enough other things against him—against all three, to hang 'em twice apiece."

"But the thing is to get proof, an' proof that'll stick. Even this kind o' proof ain't always waterproof. I've seen a murderer with ten witnesses against him acquitted. These sharps would have their own witnesses too, djuh see, an' they'd perjure themselves like li'l' men. Which is the worst o' shore-'nough legal law—perjured testimony is every bit as good as honest-to-Gawd evidence."

"You know it," corroborated Tom.

"Let's go in an' get somethin' to eat," said Miss Lenton, rising to her feet and patting down and tucking in stray and sundry locks of curly hair. "It'll make all of us feel more cheerful."

But eating added little to their sadly tattered peace of mind. The aforesaid peace was completely reduced to dust by the return after moonrise of those that had departed in the early morning. They dismounted at the kitchen door. Lumley was the first to enter.

"Bring him in," said Lumley, blatant triumph in his ferine smile. "Bring him in an' let his daughter see him."

Red Kane dropped the dish-cloth and stepped nearer to Miss Lenton. The girl carefully set down the coffee-pot she was swabbing and turned toward the doorway.

In through the doorway came her father—handcuffed.

The girl, white to the lips, took one stumbling forward step and then pitched headlong in a dead faint. But Red's long arm shot beneath her as she fell. He eased her down on the floor and turned her over on her back. Kneeling on one heel, he faced his enemy across her body. Lumley, could he have but known it, was as near death as he had ever been in his precarious life.

"I guess," observed Lumley, his porcine eyes glittering with frank delight, "I guess I get the last laugh after all."

CHAPTER XXI

A POINT OF LAW

LENTON, alias Lorimer, freed of the hand cuffs, ate his supper with appetite. His daughter hovered about him. She said no word. By the trembling of her chin it was obvious that she was very close to tears.

"You'd never 'a' got me if my hoss hadn't 'a' fell down," remarked Lenton, stirring the sugar in his third cup of coffee.

"That was a lucky tumble for us," said Lumley.

"I was talkin' to the other sheriff," explained Lenton, switching cold eyes on Lumley.

"You'll talk to me before yo're through," grinned Lumley. "You'll stretch well, old-timer. Bein' tall, yore neck'll lengthen four inches. I've seen 'em act just like rubber."

"That'll be about all," suggested Red Kane at Sheriff Lumley's exhibition of bad taste in repartee.

"I guess yes." Jake Rule confirmed the rebuke.

"I shore oughta had bettter sense'n to head back for here in the mornin'," went on the unruffled Lenton. "I might 'a' knowed you wouldn't go back to Farewell so soon."

"Tough luck," said Jake Rule. "Next time yuh'll know better."

"Next time!" sneered Billy Bruff. "They won't be no next time!"

"After my readin' the signals so plain an' all," Lenton said, paying no attention to Bruff, "to be glommed onto thisaway is shore discouragin'."

"Ain't it," assented Jake Rule. "Nemmine gettin' up, Lenton. Here's the makin's, if that's what yuh want."

"If that's the way yuh feel about it, 'no movin' goes. Yo're jomightyful cautious, ain'tcha? You must think I'm gonna try to escape or somethin'."

"I ain't trustin' you a foot," Jake told him. "I'm free to admit I'll be glad when yo're off my hands tomorrow."

"You ain't sendin' him back to Rock County tomorrow, are yuh?" demanded Red Kane.

"An' why not?" cut in Lumley hotly. "Why not, I'd like to know?"

Red Kane was at a loss for an answer. Then suddenly the fragmentary memory of a long-forgotten case stuck its head above the surface in the backwaters of his mind.

"Yuh said they's a warrant out for Ben Lenton, didn't yuh?" Red asked of Jake Rule.

"Shore," replied the Fort Creek sheriff.

"Lemme see it," said Red.

"He's got it." Jake nodded toward Lumley.

"Lemme see it," Red repeated to Lumley.

Lumley hesitated. He wanted to refuse, if only to gratify petty spite.

"Lemme see it." Red stretched forth an arm. "This warrant may not be legal."

At which Lumley produced the warrant from an inner pocket of his vest and slapped it down on Red's open palm.

"Read her off," invited Lumley, "an' see if she ain't legal to the finish."

Red opened the document and spread it flat on the table. So far as he could discover, the warrant was water-tight.

"Lessee yore extradition papers," Red said to Lumley.

Lumley did not hesitate now. He handed the papers to Red at once. At first glance the extradition papers looked to be as proof as the warrant.

"See," pointed out Lumley—"signed by both governors. What more djuh want?"

Lumley would have been better advised to keep silent. Under the spur of his speech Red remembered another detail in that long-forgotten case.

"When didja arrest Ben Lenton?" Red inquired of Jake Rule.

"This mornin'."

"Then when these extradition papers were made out he hadn't been arrested."

"That's got nothin' to do with it!" bawled Lumley. "Them papers is all right!"

"When you went to the governor of Colorado for these extradition papers," Red drawled serenely, "you hadda say the gent you wanted 'em for had been arrested, didn'tcha?"

Lumley made no reply. He looked uncertainly at Billy Bruff.

"Didn'tcha?" persisted Red Kane.

"Yes, I did," Lumley cried defiantly. "What of it?"

"Only this, feller, only this. Just a li'l' point you overlooked. When you went to yore governor an' told him Ben Lenton was arrested, you lied, see, 'cause Ben was strollin' free an' careless wherever he liked at the time. Unless a man is already arrested, yuh can't take out extradition papers for him. That's the law, an' for once the law is common-sensical. Any fool oughta know yuh can't extradite a gent who don't exist—yessir, exist. I heard Judge Allison down in Marysville use that very word—an' Lenton didn't begin to exist as a criminal under the law till he was arrested."

"But he's arrested now," exclaimed Lumley, "an' I guess you can't deny that!"

"I ain't denyin' it. I'm sayin' these papers is no good, an' yuh gotta get new ones before you can take Lenton out o' Fort Creek County. I ain't even shore that Jake Rule can hold him."

"I'll hold him all right," Jake assured Red. "Don't bet money against that. I can hold him on suspicion, anyway. Shucks, Lumley, why was you in such a hurry? Why didn'tcha wait to get yore papers till after Lenton was arrested?"

"You mean to say yuh won't honor them papers?" gasped Lumley.

"Yep." Jake nodded an emphatic head. "I dunno why I never thought of it before, but it's just like Red says: them papers wasn't no good when they was made out. This bein' so don't make me none too shore they're any good now. The best thing you can do is flit back to Colorado an' get new ones. Huh? You know as well's I do yore Colorado warrant don't travel a foot in this territory—not a foot."

"I don't give a —— whether them extradition papers wasn't no good then," bellowed Lumley, manifestly determined to override all opposition; "they're good now. He's been identified by us, ain't he? He's been arrested by you, ain't he? All right, then. Here's the extradition papers. They're drawed up legal. I call on you to obey 'em an' gimme this prisoner."

"They ain't legal!" gainsaid Red quite as vehemently. "You wanna go slow, Jake. You better——"

"I don't need nobody to tell me how to run my office, Red," interrupted the badgered Fort Creek sheriff. "They's somethin' funny about this business," he continued, turning on the Rock County man. "When you took these papers to our governor to sign you told him Lenton was in custody, like yuh told yore own governor, or you'd never 'a' got him to sign 'em. I dunno nothin' about the governor of Colorado, but I know the governor of this territory, an' he's a lawyer, an' he'd never allow no such monkeyin' with the law as this. Which I should say not in a million years. Shut up, Lumley. I'm a-doin' this talkin'. I tell yuh flat, I think yo're runnin' a brace game, but I'm willin' to be fair. We'll get legal advice on this."

"Legal advice!" yelped Lumley. "Where in Gawd's name yuh gonna get legal advice this side o' Piegan City? I can't wait for——"

"Yuh can go home whenever yo're ready. They ain't no ropes on yuh. But my prisoner don't go till I get that legal advice, an' I don't have to send to Piegan City for it, neither. Our governor's takin' a vacation up at Cutter. He told me he was gonna take a two weeks' vacation when he stopped off at Farewell an' the two weeks ain't up yet. So I'll ride up to Cutter an' find out what's what. Yuh can come along if yuh wanna."

"I don't wanna. Not for a minute. I'm gonna stay by the prisoner."

"I'll leave Kansas Casey on guard at the jail, so——"

"Then I'll help Kansas Casey," declared Sheriff Lumley. "All three of us'll help Kansas Casey. I ain't takin' no chances, Mister Sheriff, not a single chance."

"All right. Through, Lenton? Le's be movin' then. That's enough, Lumley. You've asked him about the money forty times. Let it go at that."

Red Kane, crossing the room, passed in front of Telescope Laguerre. The half-breed, who had started to rise as Jake Rule spoke, resumed his seat.

"Ain'tcha comin', Telescope?" queried Tom Loudon from the doorway.

"My pony she tire," said the half-breed, the teeth flashing white beneath his stubby mustache. "I t'ink I weel stay here aw'ile mabbeso."

WHEN the posse rode away into the moonlit night Dot Lenton slumped down on the doorsill and began to cry.

"Thassall right," said Red soothingly, awkwardly patting her shoulder. "Thassall right now. Don't yuh fret. Don't yuh fret a single mite. Yore pa ain't gonna stay in that jail long."

"Wha—what do you mean?"

The light from the kitchen slanted across the tear-stained face when she raised her head.

"I mean we're gonna get him out."

"You're goin' to get him out!"

"Yep, y' betcha." With the utmost confidence.

"How?"

She lifted a hand and laid it tremblingly on his knee.

Telescope Laguerre tactfully looked out

of the window. He was beginning to understand. Tom Kane understood but too well, and he did not look out of the window. He stared gloomily across the glowing end of his cigaret at the small hand outlined against the leather of Red's chaps.

"Le's go out to the spring," suggested Red. "I'm kind o' thirsty. Ain't you?"

Apparently the girl was, for she allowed him to help her to her feet. The two drifted away under the moon toward the spot where the cottonwoods' shadows splashed the grass with velvet black.

"In a minute he'll come back with a fine scheme to get us both hung," grumbled Tom Kane.

"How?" inquired Telescope.

"I dunno how, but I know him. You heard what he said about gettin' Lenton out o' jail, didn'tcha? Aw right, he meant it. But he's got his nerve pullin' you in, Telescope. They wasn't no call for that. I saw him pinch yore knee an' I tried to catch his eye, but he wouldn't look."

"Dat ees all right," smiled the half-breed. "Eef Red she wan' for me to help heem, by gar I weel help heem, me. W'at you t'ink about dat man Lenton, Tom?"

"We-ell, I'll tell yuh, Telescope. The evidence is all against Lenton, but I'm believin' that girl. Hell's bells, when she says a thing yuh gotta believe it. Yuh can't help yoreself. An' she says he didn't commit no murder nor robbery neither."

"Den Lenton she didn'," Telescope declared with finality. "Dat girl she have de hones' face, un dem t'ree men from Coloraydo dey have not de hones' face. I tell you, Tom, eef I was for have much beezness wit' dem t'ree men, I t'ink I would wear my seexshootair inside de waist-ban' o' my pant', by gar. I do not trus' dem not so far as I can see de skeetair een de moonlight. Gimme de match."

WHEN Red and Miss Lenton reached the spring, the blazoned purpose of their coming fled their minds. Miss Lenton turned to Red and took hold of the lapels of his vest.

"How will you get him out?" she demanded.

He found it difficult to pattern his thoughts—to speak coherently. She was so near. Her face was within six inches of his face. The sweet scent of her hair was in his nostrils. She leaned against him ever so little. The soft darkness enveloped them.

Red, feeling strangely dizzy, a throbbing roar as of many distant waterfalls in his ears, stared over the girl's head at the corral and the ranch-house where they glimmered greeny-gray in the moonshine. In the lower half of the kitchen window, as in a picture-frame, the motionless head and shoulders of Telescope Laguerre bulked against the lamplight.

"Lordy," whispered Red Kane, breathing deeply, "we ain't gonna get nowhere thisaway. Here—here's a rock, Dot. You sit on it."

She loosed her hold on his lapels and obeyed him as obediently as a little girl. He sat down cross-legged in front of her and pushed his hat back from his damp forehead.

"I got an idea," he said, his eyes on the cloudy gray oval that was her face. "It ain't all clear yet in my mind. Part I'll have to work out as I go along. Yuh gotta in a case like this, 'cause yuh never know what the other feller's gonna do.

"Yore dad'll be in the Farewell calaboose till day after tomorrow. Jake won't get back from Cutter before late tomorrow night, an' maybe he won't then. The governor may not be in Cutter. He may be off fishin' or out at Lane's Ranch over north o' Cutter about ten miles. Tump Lane's a friend o' the governor's an' it ain't likely he'd come alla way up here an' not see Tump. So yuh see, if Jake has to scout round after the governor, it'll take time, an' maybe it'll be a couple o' days before Jake gets back with what he went for.

"But I ain't figurin' to need two days. Tomorrow night, if I ain't out o' luck complete, we'll turn the trick. It's thisaway, Dot: Tom an' me'n' Telescope, we'll——"

And he went on to tell with as much detail as possible his plan for the release of Mr. Lenton.

The girl listened in silence. When he had finished she breathed a long, quivering sigh.

"I think it'll work," she said. "But there'll be danger; so I'm going with you."

Red chuckled in tender scorn of her.

"That'd be real sensible, wouldn't it?" he smiled. "Yo're chimin' in would make it twice as dangerous. Not that they's any real danger, o' course," he hastened to add. "Only a li'l' risk, an' they's that every time yuh saddle a hoss. Don't yuh worry, Dot, everythin's gonna go off like a clock wound up. We——"

"I'm going with you," she interrupted.

"Not if I gotta tie yuh down, you ain't," he told her flatly.

"I can't let you take every chance alone," she persisted stubbornly. "I'm goin', I tell you, and that's all there is to it."

"Don't yuh see that yo're needed right here?" he asked patiently. "The first place they'll search is this ranch-house an' they'll bust out here on the jump, lemme tell yuh. An' you gotta be here when they come, all ready to play the innocent. An' yuh gotta play the innocent strong—so strong they'll think yuh dunno nothin' about the jail-break. 'Cause, djuh see, if yuh dunno nothin' about it, the first thing yore dad would do'd be to come see yuh or write to yuh or let yuh know somehow; so they'll watch the ranch mighty close an' they won't scout round so energetic after yore father.

"Tom Lumley an' his two burlies won't, special. They'll take root near where they think the money is likely. An' I want 'em to do that, y'betcha. The longer they stay away from Rock County an' Flipup the better I'll be pleased. They're slick. I give 'em credit for that. They showed it by not swearin' out a warrant for yuh along with yore pa. They don't want yuh on no witness stand. Yuh got plenty o' cartridges?"

"Plenty. Why?"

"Yo're gonna be here alone, an'——"

"Silly!" she interrupted. "Who'd hurt me?"

"For thirty thousand dollars some jiggers would— Well, Dot, you gotta risk it at first till Jake an' Kansas have been out here an' asked questions. After that yuh spend all the time yuh can in Farewell. Stay with Joy Blythe, Mike Flynn's partner, or Mis' Jackson. They'll be tickled to death to have yuh. I'll tell Telescope to pass the word to Jake an' Kansas to lookout yore game all they can. They bein' after yore pa won't make no differ. They ain't gonna see no woman hurt. Will yuh do as I say now? Well, that ain't much of a promise, but I s'pose I'll have to be satisfied. Yo're the doctor. Huh? No, Dot, I don't wanna hear! I don't wanna know where the money's hid. I might talk in my sleep or get delirious or somethin' an' let it out. You keep it to yoreself. Shore, I know yuh trust me, but I'd a heap rather yuh didn't tell me."

Her body swayed toward him.

"You're good," she whispered. "You're just good. I—I— Red, if you get my father out of this I'll marry you."

"Will yuh?" said he calmly, not changing his position in the slightest. "Would that be the only reason?"

"I'll risk the—the other," she affirmed unsteadily.

"Not with me." Emphatically. "Look here, girl," he continued in lower but no whit less earnest tones, "this love part o' marriage is the greatest thing in the world. It's the only reason they is for marriage. The only thing that makes bein' married worth while is love. It's like the saddle on the hoss, Dot. The hoss can be rode bareback, but even if he don't pile yuh, yo're shore to be a heap weary an' wanna get off an' walk before long. I don't—I wouldn't have yuh marry me till yuh say yuh love me. Yuh can't say that now, can yuh?"

"I don't know. I'm not sure. I——"

"There now. If yuh loved me, yuh'd say so right out."

"But I tried to, Red. I did, honestly. An' I can't. It—it wouldn't be true."

"Shore, thassall right. It will be true. Yuh got to love me. No two ways about that. Yuh just gotta. An' yo're gonna. I can wait. Yo're a heap worth waitin' for."

"But—but suppose I never am able to say it truthfully?"

At this he swept an arm across and downward as one who brushes away the trifling fly.

"I'm tellin' you over an' over again," he affirmed with the utmost earnestness, "that yo're gonna. G-O-N-E—gone, T-O—to—gonna. Why, listen, girl, I never was religious much. They's more dance-halls than churches out here, anyway, an' besides I never thought about such things, bein' busy myself most always; but if they ain't a Heaven, then why was I allowed to find you like I did? Shore, Heaven wouldn't never 'a' lemme fall in love with you so hard if you wasn't meant to love me back sometime. Now, don't say nothin'. Just you set right still an' think it over. I gotta go in the house an' fix things up with Tom an' Telescope."

WHEN Red entered the ranch-house the half-breed looked at him woodenly. Tom, apparently plunged in the dark depths of gloom, stared sulkily at his own toes.

Red sat down on the table edge and smiled cheerily.

"We gotta get Ben Lenton out o' jail," said he. "I got it planned to a fareyou-well. All we gotta do——"

"What'd I tell yuh, Telescope?" interrupted Tom. "Here's where we all git ten years apiece at Piegan City, if we ain't buried first, which is also plumb likely. G'on, Red. Don't lemme choke yuh off."

"You ain't," Red said calmly, unhurriedly building a cigaret. "I've changed my mind. I'll tell yuh my scheme while we're ridin' to the Bar S. We'll save time thataway."

"Whadda yuh wanna go to the Bar S for?" demanded the irritable Tom. "I thought you was through once."

"I am, but I want my time. I got seventy round hard simoleums a-comin' to me an' they'll be right handy for a young gent my size. What say we start in about ten minutes? I gotta pack in some water from the spring first. Nemmine about helpin' me. Thank yuh most to death. I'm plenty able to lift two pails without strainin' any muscles."

CHAPTER XXII

THE BAR S

"AN' IF any sport present has a better idea," said Red as the horses single-footed through the moonshot night, "le's hear it."

"Swelled head, ain't he?" grunted Tom to Telescope. "My own brother an' all swelled up like a poisoned pup. You don't mean to say yuh thought that all up without any help, Red—yore own self, out o' yore own head?"

"I mean to say lots o' things," said Red, "but if I was to tell yuh only a quarter o'em yuh'd get insulted an' drill me. Which will be about all from you."

"Oh, will it, you poor redheaded chipmunk. You shore got all kinds o' gall, you have. My barn! You act like barns didn't cost nothin'. Aw, I know you'll pay me some day. You bet you will, old settler. But alla same, if you'd prance out an' do all yore li'l funny businesses private so's if anybody's wiped out it'll be only yoreself, I'd be tickled to death. But not you. Oh, no, not by a mile an' a half. You gotta rope in Telescope, just as if he was interested. My ——, Red, ain't I enough?"

"I ain't heard Telescope kickin' none," countered Red.

"You won' neither," declared the half-breed. "Dees weel be amusant *bien sur.* I do not like dat Meestair Lumley. She have de beeg mouth."

"They know Telescope stayed at Lorimer's—Lenton's I mean, after they left," said Tom, dubiously rubbing his chin with the back of his hand. "Maybe now they'd be suspicious of him. Maybe now they wouldn't ask him to do no trailin'."

"Trust Telescope." Red nodded a confident head. "They know he's the best trailer in the territory. Shore they'll ask him."

"You bet you," affirmed the half-breed. "I have been de scout; I have leeve wit' Enjun. I weel mak dem sheriff' see wat I wan' dem to see un tink wat I wan' dem to tink. I weel walk een de watair-r-r plenty," he added emphatically, and his black eyes rolled in company with the rolled r's.

"See, Tom," Red pointed out kindly, "yo're a fool like always. But don't get downhearted. Maybe yuh'll outgrow it."

Mere words could not possibly do justice to Tom's feelings, but he did his best.

Two hours later, when the ground began to lift to the eastern shoulder of Indian Ridge, they split one and two, Telescope riding away toward Farewell, the brothers heading southward into the Big Bend of the Lazy River where lay the Bar S ranch.

"An' I gotta leave my business," complained Tom, once Telescope was beyond hearing, "an' help you get a girl I don't wantcha to get."

"You ain't helpin' me to get no girl," tossed back Red. "Not for a minute you ain't. Yo're only gonna help me get her pa out o' jail. Thassall, Tom. Just a li'l' jail-bustin'."

"Same thing, feller, same thing. Don'tcha guess I know how yuh'll stand with that girl when we turn her pa loose? I ain't no plumb idjit if I am yore brother. —— it all, she'll fall on yore neck like she's never gonna leggo. An' then yuh'll marry her."

"That'll be great," declared Red, and the happiness in his voice was tremendous.

"Goo'by," snarled the goaded Tom, "you've gone under for the third time. I knowed it. You always was the unlucky one of us two."

"Unlucky?"

"Shore, unlucky; but they's no tellin' how much till after yuh been married six months. Unlucky! Which I should remark! You'll look at me caperin' round foot-free an' fancy-loose an' you'll say, 'Lordy, I used to be like that once! An' me, I'll lay back an' laugh at yuh. Don'tcha never tell me I didn't warn yuh. I got a sore throat doin' it."

At midnight they made a dry camp beside the trail and slept four hours. They were trotting on at a few minutes past four.

The Bar S outfit were noisily sitting down to breakfast in the log dining-room adjoining the cook-shack when Red and his brother walked in.

"Here's the trouble-makers," bawled Buff Warren. "Licked the rest o' the 88 yet, Tom?"

"Not yet," grinned Tom. "I done left a few for you fellers."

"We don't never get a chance at 'em," mourned the vainglorious "Kid." "You bet they keep out o' our way."

"Hear who's talkin'!" cried Dave Contrell. "Ever since the Kid's voice changed for good he acts just like a grown-up. Wears a gun an' everythin'."

"I see I gotta come back," said Red, swinging a leg over the bench at Dave's side. "The Kid shore needs a chaperon. An' I was the only one that ever could manage him. Has Jimmie had to spank him lately?"

Here the maligned and affronted Kid flung a hunk of bread. Red ducked and countered with a dill pickle, long and luscious, that struck the Kid on the left eye and spattered his face most nobly.

"Ow!" yelled the Kid and, clapping his neckerchief to the smarting eye, he rushed outdoors in quest of cooling waters.

"Things ain't changed a bit," observed Red as, keeping both hands busy the while, he looked about him with innocent eyes.

"Neither have you, yuh walrus!" shrilled the Kid's Twin from across the table. "Dave, that road-agent has glommed yore plate an' knife an' fork!"

"Thassall right," Red said easily, halting a forkful of fried ham and eggs half-way to his mouth. "Dave hadn't used 'em yet."

THE fork completed its journey. Red worked his jaws squirrel-wise with great rapidity and winked at the outraged Dave, who was guarding his coffee-cup with one hand and reaching for a clean plate with the other.

Chug! Something soft and squashy struck Red in the back of the neck as he was in the act of stuffing more ham between his jaws. Said jaws came together with a snap and tears stood in Red's eyes.

"I guess we're even now," chirped the Kid, skipping round the table and hopping nimbly into his seat. "That potato wasn't as soft as I'd 'a' liked, but it was the best I could find. What's the matter, Reddy? Didn't bite yore cheek, didja?"

"No-o," drawled Red, making manful effort to speak distinctly, for he had indeed severely bitten his cheek. "No-o, I was just a-studyin' whether I'd feed here with the animals or go out to the corral an' eat with the folks."

"You better stay here," suggested Bill Holliday. "You'll feel more at home."

"I might feel plumb at home," said Red, "if Tim Page would stop lookin' at me. He ain't took his eyes off me since I come in."

"You bet I ain't," averred Tim. "I been admirin' yore leather cuffs, Red—yore nice new leather cuffs. They look a lot like the cuffs I asked Old Salt to get for me an' he told you to get instead."

"Shore they're the same cuffs, Tim," Red affirmed heartily. "I like 'em so well I'm gonna keep 'em myself. I know you won't mind."

"Me mind! Oh, ——, no! Which I got a nature like a suckin' calf, I'm that gentle. An' my handkerchief! Whatcha done with that?"

"I got that, too," Red admitted in a sorrowful tone.

"I know yuh have, you skinny scoundrel! I had my mouth all set an' waterin' for a green handkerchief, an' when I heard about you gettin' all gormed up in yore battle with the 88 I pranced down to Farewell to get my own stuff. An' it ain't to be got. They ain't a green handkerchief within four hundred miles, an' the cuffs was all sold out, too. Gall! My ——!

An' you got the nerve to come back here an' look me in the eye after glommin' my clo'es. Look at him, gents, he thinks it's a —— of a joke."

"Well, an' ain't it?" defended Red warmly. "The drinks are all on Tim. I'll leave it to anybody. Besides, leather cuffs an' green handkerchiefs are vain. Next Tim'll wanna be wearin' them ruffle-cum-tuffle jiggers on his shirts an' tyin' pink ribbons round his li'l' ears all same female woman. Didn't you get a letter from me, Tim, with yore money in it?"

"No, I didn't, but——"

"Then that's all right, 'cause I didn't send no letter. So I'll give yuh yore coin when I get through eatin'. When's the coffee comin', anyway?"

It came at that instant in a large pot borne by Jimmie the cook.

"Yuh might know Red was back," grinned Jimmie. "Soon's I seen the Kid run out holdin' his eye an' cussin' to beat —— I knowed our Reddy had come home. An' how is the li'l' feller? An' has he been a good boy while he was away from papa? Look out, yuh poor fool! Leggo my leg! Djuh wanna spill the coffee? You won't never stop bein' a idjit, Red, will yuh? Serve yuh right if I'd poured the coffee down yore neck an' burnt yuh good. Look how nice brother's behavin'. He's got manners, he has."

"An' why wouldn't he? He never lived with you fellers like I have. Hell's bells, it's a wonder to me I'm still a human bein'. Good thing I ain't here no more. Gimme another year o' the Bar S an' I'd be gettin' weak-minded like you, Jimmy, or always on the prod like Tim Page over nothin'. Lordy, it shore makes me shiver when I think what a narrow escape I had. Is that a piece o' ham yonder? It looks like ham. It cuts like ham. An' it tastes like ham. What could be fairer than that?"

"Give him the plate, Dave," said Jimmy resignedly, "so's he can scrape it. They's a li'l' piece o' lean in one corner an' a small piece of fat in another, an' I'd hate for him to miss 'em. He might think he hadn't had a good time if he hadn't ate everythin' in sight."

"He eats like that Hollister gent," said Sam the Borrower.

"He eats faster," modified Hockling critically, "but Hollister opened his mouth wider. Hold more, too, Hollister could."

"Hollister," repeated Red when he had gulped a mouthful. "Was he a skinny gent, Hock, with wide shoulders, an' small feet? Don't smile much."

"He didn't smile none while he was here," said Hockling. "He stayed all night."

"When was he here?"

"Last Monday."

"D'he say where he was goin'?"

"He didn't say, but he rode away south. Why? Is he wanted?"

"Not that I know of. Only he seems to 'a' got the habit o' eatin' where I do, an' I was wonderin'. He's a Association detective likely. They're always roamin' round."

"But they ain't no rustlin' goin' on here," objected the Kid. "Maybe he's one o' them road-agents."

"Every time the Kid sees a stranger," jeered Dave Contrell, "he thinks he sees a road-agent an' goes to loosenin' his six-shooter."

"He's been tryin' to organize a Vigilance Committee for a month," supplemented Buff Warren. "But so far him an' the Twin are the only members. They're shore bloodthirsty, the both of 'em."

"Maybe they're right, at that," said Red judiciously. "I've done read some'ers where children are supposed to have more sense than regular folks."

"Is that so?" both children cried in unison. "Is that so? You wait. You old gran'pops think yo're so smart. You just wait. We'll have us a road-agent, maybe a couple, while yo're twiddlin' yore fat thumbs."

After breakfast Red went to the bunk-house and packed his few belongings in his saddle pockets and *cantinas*. Carrying his warbags, he went to the office for his pay.

Mr. Saltoun was sitting at the desk. Tom Loudon was sitting upon it. There was no rancor in the latter's greeting, but the former eyed Red grumpily.

"Yo're a dandy," said Mr. Saltoun. "I told you to let that 88 bunch alone, an' now we got all the makin's of a fine an' healthy cattle war on our hands."

"You let my brother Tom alone," grinned Red, "an' he'll kill 'em all off for yuh. I'll be glad to help myself, if that'll do yuh any good."

"Helpin' yoreself always was yore strong play," grunted Mr. Saltoun, purposely mistaking Red's meaning. "I s'pose yuh want yore time."

"Me? No-o, not for a minute. Whadda I care for money? Bag o' shells, thassall it is, like I heard a actress lady say once."

"I'm laughin'," Mr. Saltoun said with deep sarcasm. "I'm laughin' fit to split. Tom, will yuh draw this gent's check before I choke? My ——, the trouble you unthinkin' punchers fall into is amazin'. How a man can make money out o' cows I don't see. Drought, the itch an' blizzards, an' if it ain't them it's a cattle war. An' everythin' dear as the devil. Red, that infernal Piney Jackson sent in a bill for that buckboard as long as my arm."

"Piney Jackson, o' course!" exclaimed Red. "Now why didn't I think o' that before?"

"I wish you had, then maybe you'd 'a' tied that buckboard team some'ers else instead o' right in front o' that stampedin' stage."

"I don't mean that. But Piney— Now, you an' him was in the army together, wasn't you?"

"We went through the Sioux Campaign o' '68—'69 together. I was scout for Forsyth an' he was a blacksmith."

"Was yuh ever at Fort Rockham, Idaho?"

"I wasn't. But Piney was transferred there in the Fall o' '70 six months before his time was out. He like to froze nine times. To hear him tell it yuh'd think that Winter was hard just on his account."

"Was the Third Cavalry at Rockham then?"

"Shore. Piney was transferred to the Third. Didn't I say so?"

"Not till now. It don't matter. Piney Jackson! O' course, I'd 'a' thought o' him later, but it might 'a' been too late then. I was born lucky, I guess."

"You was born crazy, more like," Mr. Saltoun declared with conviction. "What's all this about Piney Jackson? Whatcha talkin' about, anyway? You ain't drunk. It's too early in the mornin' for that. Whatsa matter with yuh, Red, huh?"

"Nemmine whatsa matter with me," grinned Red. "It's a secret. I got troubles o' my own, I have, an' they're botherin' me plenty like rheumatics in gran'pop's left leg. Sometimes I just dunno what I'm gonna do. Naw, sir, I don't. Blot that check plumb good after she's signed, will yuh, Salt? Yo're writin's so bad anyway they's no sense in makin' it worse."

Red and Tom were miles on their way to Farewell when Mr. Saltoun made the unwelcome discovery that Telescope Laguerre had not returned.

"He stayed at that nester's place when the rest o' yuh left, didn't he?" he said to his son-in-law. "An' that no-account good-for-nothin'-a-tall Red Kane was there too, wasn't he? Well, then he's gone an' got Telescope into some devilment, that's what. Aw, you can't tell me nothin' about Red Kane. When you first told me about Telescope's stayin' behind, Tom, I had a slinkin' idea they was a badger in the hole some'ers an' now I know it. Can't you do nothin' besides laugh, Tom? Telescope's the best man in the outfit, —— the —— —— luck!"

AT NIGHTFALL Red and Tom were sitting amid boulders at the mouth of a small draw north of Indian Ridge. From where they sat they could see the lights of Farewell a-glint across the wide flat.

"Telescope oughta be here soon," muttered Red.

Tom nodded. It was too hot to talk. There was no breeze stirring. The sun had gone down a flaming red disk. The indications were all for a burning hot day on the morrow.

Red ran a slow finger round the inside of the loosened collar of his shirt and pulled the damp flannel away from his perspiring skin. He took off his neckerchief and fanned his hot face with it. The said neckerchief was a cheap and utterly chaste blue bandanna which had takent he place of the green silk sequestered by Miss Lenton.

Red did not like the blue bandanna. It may be said that he loathed it with a great loathing. For he was a finicky individual in some respects, and cotton cloth was not his idea of a fitting neck covering. Green silk now— But there was to be no more green silk ever again. Red reknotted the bandanna and settled his shoulders against a boulder. He straightened quickly, for the rock still retained much of the sun's heat.

"Burn yoreself?" chuckled Tom, who had done that very thing in the same manner a moment before.

"Burn myself?" queried Red. "Now why should I burn myself on this nice cool rock. Yo're talkin' foolish, man."

Tom made no retort. Instead, he inclined his head as one who listens to sounds afar off.

"Telescope comin'," said Tom.

"Then Telescope's ridin' more'n one hoss," amplified Red, listening in his turn. "Le's get back a ways. They's some tamaracks behind these boulders."

Leading their horses, they withdrew to the shelter of the tamaracks. Here, among the sticky tree-trunks, they waited and watched. Their fingers gripped the noses of their horses. For, be it known, the horse is a friendly animal and will call to his kind upon all occasions.

"Don't sound like they're comin' from Farewell," hazarded Tom.

"They ain't," declared Red. "More out o' the northwest."

"They're headin' to pass right near them boulders where we was a-settin'. Whadda you guess?"

"Yeah—four of 'em."

The approaching horsemen were riding at a slow trot. The moon was still three hours under the horizon but the starlight was bright enough to reveal the dim shapes of four riders as they passed in single file the boulder-strewn mouth of the draw.

The leading horse stumbled as a stone rolled under an incautiously placed forefoot. His rider jerked him up and called him names. His tone was not excessively loud. But Red and his brother heard him distinctly. They were not twenty yards distant.

The four shadowy horsemen, holding religiously to their unhurried gait, disappeared in the darkness. The patter of the hoofbeats dwindled and died away in the southeast.

"Sounded like Hollister's voice, kind o'," said Tom, dropping his restraining hand from the nose of his horse.

"Kind o'! It was Hollister. I've heard him talk three-four times. He seems to have found friends. I wonder what his business is, anyway?"

"Yo're gettin' as suspicious as the Kid an' the Kid's Twin. Ain't we packin' enough trouble without worryin' about Hollister? He ain't done nothin' to us. Leave him be. We got a man's-size job to fuss with, feller; so le's wrastle it."

"But he headed south from the Bar S an' now here he is north o' the Bar S an' headin' southeast."

"She's a free country. It's nothin' against a man if he rides the range, I guess. He may have regular business. Yuh dunno."

"He may have, an' then again he may not. All right, all right, have it yore own way, Tom. Hollister's a tin he-saint with li'l' gold eye-winkers if you say so. My ——, anythin' for peace an' quiet. She's too hot to argue."

"Then don't argue."

"I ain't. Ain't I said I ain't? Hell's bells, three of 'em in a row! I said I'd try an' do better an' I clean forgot. Hell's bells, I dunno— Lordy, it's harder'n I thought."

Red rubbed a worried forehead and kicked a tree-trunk.

" 'Three of 'em in a row,' " repeated the mystified Tom. "Whatcha talkin' about? Whatcha gonna try an' do better? What's harder'n you thought? If yuh mean yore face yo're out o' luck. She's always been that way, an' it gets harder the older yuh grow."

"Tom," said Red solemnly, "why do yuh say 'them things'?"

"Them things what? I ain't said nothin' about no things. What things yuh mean?"

"I mean 'them,' not 'things.' Don'tcha see?"

"Not for a minute I don't. What part o' the head is the pain in? Maybe you better lie down a spell. Le's go sit down anyway—back where we was. Maybe it'll pass off."

"You don't understand," persisted Red, following Tom among the boulders. "I mean you'n' me are plumb ignorant. We ain't—haven't got no education."

"Is that all?" said Tom comfortably, dropping full length on a patch of grass. "Is that what's makin' you talk so funny? I thought you was sick or somethin'. Shore we got education. Can't we read an' write, huh? An' figger figgers, too. What more education do we need'n that, I'd like to know? Education! You talk like a —— fool, Red."

"An' they's somethin' else," pursued Red, hot upon his subject. "We cuss an' swear alla time. We don't open our mouths but what we cuss high, wide an' frequent. That ain't no way to do, Tom. Ain't you got no decency?"

"Plenty. I got so much it hurts like a cramp. Yo're lettin' that girl honeyfuggle yuh, Red. She's been a-talkin' to yuh. I can see that as plain as the W G R brand an' that takes up the whole side of a cow. When yuh gonna quit smokin'? My ——, this here love business is shore ——."

"Yeah, oh, yeah, shore an' y'betcha," sneered Red. "Yuh know —— well yo're a-talkin' thataway alla time 'cause no woman would look at yuh, yuh poor frazzled end of a misspent life. Yo're jealous, that's whatsa matter."

"Jealous? Jealous?" Tom cackled scornfully. "Jealous of you? Don't make me laugh! Which I'd as soon be jealous o' one o' my mules. Sooner, by ——. You can teach a mule somethin'. Couldn't teach you nothin' in forty years."

"If you was the teacher it would shore take longer'n that. Yessir, Tom, yo're a low-down miserable worm. Yo're so low-down an' so miserable you ain't even fit for bait, an' the funny part is you dunno it. Yo're satisfied to be a worm with nothin' in sight when yuh git old an' skinny with false teeth and rheumatics. No li'l' home an' a wife for Tom Kane. Naw, sir, he'd rather be a worm an' slime round with the other reptyles."

"You bet he would!" cried the thoroughly provoked Tom. "He ain't no fool, whatever else he is, you can gamble on that! But you go on an' get married an' have yore wife an' yore home if yuh wanna. Go to —— any way yuh like. I ain't sayin' a word, not a word. I guess maybe I got somethin' to do besides look out your game, old settler. Quit that, now. Don'tcha heave no more pebbles or I'll——"

"W'at ees de mattair?" interrupted a disapproving voice at their backs. "You was mak' a noise so I was hear you way off yonder un you was not hear me w'en I ride een un tie my pony een de tamarack. You have de shut ear, by gar."

"Tom's always gettin' loud, Telescope," said Red as the half-breed noiselessly slid up and squatted down between them. "Yuh know how his tongue works when he's excited over anythin'. He's gotta tell the neighbors all about it too. I spoke to him several times, but——"

"Aw, shut up, Red. Le's hear what Telescope's got to say."

"Jake ees steel at Cutter," said Telescope, "un dem tree strangair dey hang roun' de jail all tam. Kansas Casey stay wit' dem, *bien sur*. Dey are not many pony tie to de heetchin'-rail—aw, ten, mabbeso."

Red looked eastward.

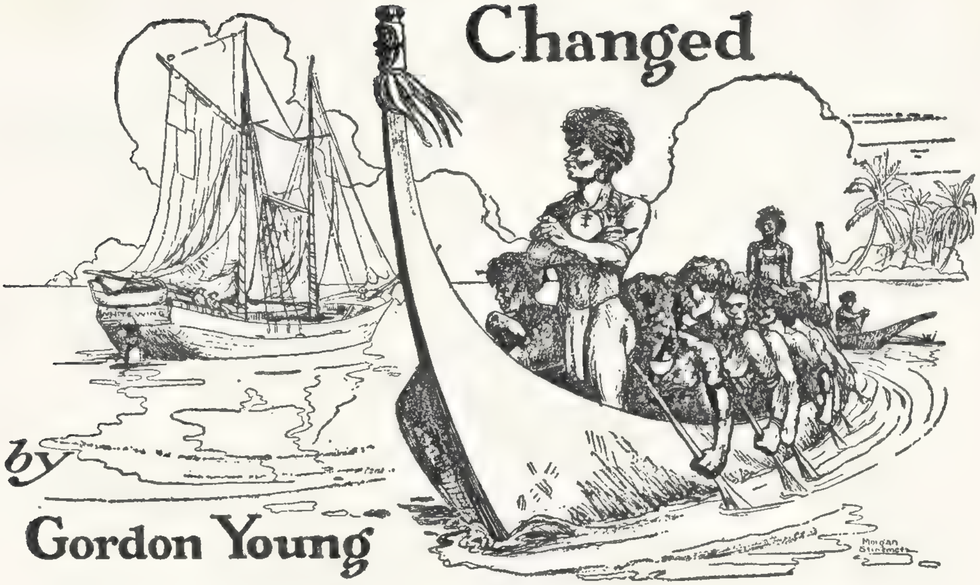
"The moon won't rise for three hours," he said. "Let's go."

TO BE CONTINUED

Changed

by

Gordon Young



Author of "Savages," "Heathens," etc.

THEY called him "the coward" on board Dan McSpadden's schooner because he flinched every time a gun was fired; and when the cutter had been rowed off the beach at Santa Cruz and McSpadden and Old Billy had shot at the hundred howling savages flinging arrows toward the boat, he had dropped his oar and stopped his ears.

So it happened that the same night, when McSpadden, big and burly and afraid of nothing under heaven, had caught him in the moonlight by the main hatch whispering to Nina McSpadden—well, any other man would have been drowned, but the coward was like a fish in water. And Nina had screamed when her father flung the boy overboard; and the old man, who was not cruel, but very hasty and violent, had heaved to and lowered away.

Furlong might be a coward, but he was a great sailor. It could be said that the ship was his cradle and the ocean was his mother. He had been born the son of a trader—and he had been born at that moment when Chinese pirates, ranging south a hundred miles off Canton, had taken it into their heads to board the little bark. There was fighting on deck and the roar of guns, and the infant's screams mingled with those of his frightened mother's. She died that night and so did his father—the father cleft from shoulder to collar-bone with a kris. And the mate of the bark had edged his way south and around the Australian coast to Sydney and, being an honest man, had told a true story and adopted the infant and left it with his wife in port.

Then the bark went down and the wife was widowed and had no love for the baby, which was bandied from hand to hand and sent to sea almost as soon as it could toddle, to be out of the way.

At eighteen Dick Furlong shipped with Dan McSpadden, trader. He shipped because he had caught sight of Dan McSpadden's daughter and learned that she went with her father wherever the *White Wing* threw her canvas to the winds.

It is not much of an exaggeration to say that Furlong had learned to swim before he could walk. No native was more at home in the water than he, and even native children dive deep for shells and frighten off or fight a shark as our children throw rocks at a dog.

"Dick," said the girl when she had found him at the wheel one night and knew that her father was asleep, "you are a coward. You know it."

Now, she said it tenderly, as one regretfully stating a fact that had to be faced. She did not want to love the boy; or rather she did not want to love a coward. But women's hearts are unruly.

"I know it," he said frankly. "Are you 'fraid of snakes?"

"No," she answered scornfully.

"Spiders?"

"No!"

"Are you afraid of anything, Nina?"

"These great big black cannibals—if I drink coffee at night, I'm sure to stay awake till eight bells and then put in the rest of the night fighting them!"

"I'm not afraid of them. Honest, Nina. But a gun—it isn't the bullet, you know. It's the noise. I can't stand it. On the *Lucy B.*—the last ship 'fore *White Wing*—they had a one-pounder. It was all I could do to keep from jumpin' overboard ever' time they fired her. I'll go aloft with the best, Nina. I've gone over the side with a knife and ripped open a shark that was after a black boy. But a gun—I wouldn't—I couldn't—fire a gun! I just simply can't help it!"

"And father liked you, too!" she said regretfully; for the old man had thought Furlong a great boy until that Santa Cruz affair.

Perhaps if Nina and her father and young Furlong had studied that modern science of psychoanalysis, and if they had known that Mrs. Furlong herself had always had a dread of firearms and had died more of fright than of anything else at the hour of Dick's birth, they would all have understood that the boy could no more have helped his fear of the guns' roar than he could have helped having deep, soft brown eyes.

"Billy," said McSpadden as the schooner came close to a bay on Guadalcanar, "I'm afraid we'll find trouble here. Never run from a nigger yet when I was on my own ship. Be —— if I will now."

The schooner was no sooner headed into the bay than the wind began to die down. It was around noon. There was no surf, and the water was deep and clear as in a glass bowl. As the saying goes, one could count the scales on the belly of a shark.

The schooner was met by a swarm of natives. Ordinarily Captain McSpadden would not have dropped anchor in a strange bay where the savages were not to be trusted, but now he let go the anchor; for there was no wind to go about with, and if the schooner were left to drift she might go on the rocks and have to hang through low-tide even after the evening breeze came up.

The savages, in many little canoes and one big one, would not at first paddle closer than fifty yards. They kept a wary lookout, as if expecting to be fired on. And they said nothing, which was strange for savages. They would not even answer the hail of the captain. He had no way of knowing that less than a week before a recruiter had been along and kidnaped a dozen stalwart black boys, and that the tribe was sworn to be revenged on the next ship that came near.

Nina stood with her father on the poop and kept her eyes on the great war-canoe that could easily hold sixty men, though it was not quite full. At stem and stern a slender figure stood up over ten feet. This and the sides of the canoe were decorated with cowry shells and mother-of-pearl.

The fifty men in the canoe were evidently the finest warriors of the village. They were big fellows, flat-featured, with bushy hair. Their dark bodies glistened with coconut oil. They were naked except for necklaces of boar's tusks, bracelets and armlets of cowry shell and a bark clout. No weapons were in sight but Nina knew very well that they might be in the bottom of the boat.

There were about two hundred of the natives on the water and probably twenty of the small canoes—dugouts with outriggers.

The great war-canoe, driven by the regular sweep of the twenty and more paddles that dipped the water on each side, was circling around and around the little schooner and gradually moving in closer.

Whether the natives were merely being cautious or intended to make an attack, Captain McSpadden could not tell.

"You go down to the cabin and lock yourself in," said the captain to Nina. "There may be trouble."

NINA looked at her father in exasperation. Or rather she looked at his back, for he had given her the orders and had turned away expecting them to be followed without further comment. She didn't want to go to the cabin. Of all places that was the one where she did not want to be. Down there alone, wondering how the fight was going and imagining the worst, would be more distressing than on deck watching. Besides, she was seventeen and had followed her father over the seas for ten years; she could shoot straight and she—well, she had no intention of doing what he told her, but she knew better than to argue with him.

So she went far enough down the companionway to be out of sight yet able to peep out and listen.

There were only sixteen men on the *White Wing* and twelve of those were natives, black boys—Samoans, Tongans and Fijians.

Old Billy came up the poop ladder, followed by four of the natives. All were armed and he was carrying three extra rifles, which he carefully stood up against the skylight. No one noticed when Nina's slender arm reached cautiously out and took one of the rifles.

Old Billy had been a man-o'-warsman in the British navy thirty years before. He was short and square-built, with legs bowed as if they had grown around the bottom of a boat. He wore a short bushy beard but out of deference to Queen Victoria's wishes regarding the barbering of her sailormen had kept his upper lip shaven.

He was over sixty and, though he might get out of breath a little sooner than in his younger days, he was still a man that could put up a fierce fight and keep it up. And he had no gods before Nina; and though he would not admit it to anybody, and after the Santa Cruz incident was rather ashamed of it himself, he had a pretty strong affection for Dick Furlong—coward.

"What'd you do with the coward?" said McSpadden.

"Stuck 'im on the deck-'ouse forrard, sir, with four black boys. I'm sendin' four more to the yards, an' they can 'elp pick cannibals off 'm there. I'll be forrard myself, sir."

"You think there is danger?" the captain asked.

Nina, venturing her pretty blond head around the edge of her hiding-place, fastened her bright blue eyes on Old Billy's weather-worn face and anxiously awaited the verdict.

"I know it!" said Old Billy positively.

"And are you sure they are going to attack?" asked Mr. Summers, who was a kind of supercargo and navigator combined, a man of education who had taken to the ocean for his health.

"I'm afraid so," said McSpadden, slowly turning and viewing the little canoes that edged closer and closer. "They will try to come over the fo'c'sle."

"I'll go forrard an' see as they don't," said Old Billy, moving away.

It happens that Nina knew her father as well as most daughters of seventeen do. She knew that if he caught sight of her aft he would make her go below; but she knew too that if there should be a fight and all came out well he would be in a good humor and readily forgive her for having disobeyed him. And if the fight didn't come out well—then it would make precious little difference where she was, except that it would be better to be dead with the rest of the ship's company than to have to shoot one's self as the cannibals broke through the cabin door.

Not that she reasoned all that out in so many words—but she understood the situation. And there was another and not uninfluential idea in her mind; she believed that by her side, under her eyes, Furlong would not flinch from the roar of a rifle, and she did not want him to flinch. She wanted him to be conspicuously brave. Her father would forgive a brave man anything—even having stolen the heart of his daughter. Moreover, the forward deck-house would be safe for her with Old Billy on guard there, and although her father might see her he could not order her below—not after the cannibals had boarded.

The big war-canoe continued to circle the schooner. The savages seemed to be considering whether or not to come closer. The chief of the chiefs, or king—in the villages there are often many chiefs and the greatest of these is king—sat in the stern. He might be distinguished by a large moon-shaped piece of white shell about the size of a dinner plate that was suspended on his breast. He was a small, wiry man with a withered face; a cunning man, who was circling and circling the *White Wing* and counting the number of the crew.

At a word from him the paddles dipped slower, so that the canoe seemed scarcely to move through the water. It passed within twenty-five yards of the *White Wing's* stern and fifty black, flat faces, many with long bits of bone stuck through the end of the nose, stared up at Captain McSpadden.

He called to them in a friendly tone, holding up one of the trade axes which are greatly prized by all natives, to show that he had come as a peaceful man of commerce, but there was no answer. The canoe passed on slowly, slowly, and as silently as though rowed by black shadows.

Suddenly, as it rounded the schooner's bow, the king leaped to his feet with a yell. With one stroke of the paddles the war-canoe was brought around short and the second sweep of the paddles sent it, head on, straight for the bow of the *White Wing*.

And at once, all about the ship, those black forms that had moved about like voiceless specters became as howling demons. Their yells filled the air. The little canoes that were farthest away splashed frantically to come in close. Those nearer dropped their paddles and snatched tomahawks from where they had been lying at their feet.

The war-canoe came straight for the bow, grazed alongside, and the natives—some of them seizing the jib-stay and coming over the bowsprit, some of them leaping to the shoulders of their fellows and springing from there above the freeboard—began climbing on to the schooner.

From the deck-house, from the yards and from the poop the rifles were cracking; and though a native, even when not excited, is rarely a good shot, the rifles made a wicked noise and the cannibals were too thick for many of the bullets to go astray. Besides, those rifles in the hands of Old Billy, Captain McSpadden and Mr. Summers were steady and true; while Dick Furlong, stubbornly grinding his teeth and shutting both eyes each time he pulled the trigger, aimed blindly down at the swarming savages.

Nina, who had been slipping forward so that she could not be called back, was caught by the rush just forward of the main hatch.

She could not have been in a more dangerous place. That she was not instantly cut down was due to the fact that she had backed herself against the deck-house and coolly shot down the first savage that came at her. Another thing that saved her and perhaps the others was that savages, when they succeed in boarding a ship, are much more intent on plundering in it than in getting rid of the crew. Those who broke into the trade-room and deck-houses were safely out of the fire zone and searched busily for loot.

Dick had been standing at the edge of the deck-house when Nina's rifle went off just below him. He gave a cry—a wild cry of alarm and consternation—and leaped; and as he went he turned his gun into a club so that as he came down it was laid across the head of a cannibal that was running forward at the girl.

Cannibal and sailor went to the deck, but Dick was up, elbow and knee, at once. From his left side he drew the long knife that always swung to his wrist from a lanyard when he went into shark-infested water. One hand held the knife, the other the war-club snatched from the fingers of the dead savage, and, flinging himself before the girl, he struck right and left.

❖

IT WAS hot and fast work, but the boy's muscles were tough as ratlines; his lungs, stretched and tempered with ocean breeze from the very first breath, were as near to leather as lungs can be; and than he a tiger-fish was scarcely more quick or fierce.

Old Billy had sworn in contemptuous rage when he saw the boy jump, for he thought panic had set him crazy. But at a glance below Old Billy's great voice roared out hearty oaths of encouragement.

"Out cutlasses and board!" yelled the old fellow, in his excitement echoing a command of those naval days when ships came alongside of each other and men struggled from deck to deck.

And as he yelled his cutlass came out and he dropped feet first and with a mighty slash stained the steel and cleared space for the free swinging of his powerful arm.

Old Billy stood before Nina and to her right. Dick stood before her and to the left. Between them the girl, her face pale and tense, stood wanting to pray but not daring to take the time, for as fast as she could load and shoot she did.

From the poop Captain McSpadden and the others saw the hand-to-hand fighting of Old Billy and Dick, but between poop and deck-house the deck was alive with cannibals. The native sailors, from deckhouse, yards and poop, were comparatively safe and shot fast, so that the scuppers ran blood.

Wounded savages fling themselves overboard and those unwounded fight fiercely only when it is easy to win. If victory be in doubt, they run. There were many who went overboard. The savages still in the canoes, seeing such numbers dropping away wounded and in terror, paddled off to a safe distance and waited.

McSpadden was not the man to hesitate when his daughter was in peril; with rifle and trade ax in either hand he lunged down the ladder to hack his way through. Summers came after him, firing as he went. And the Tongans on the poop gave a mighty war-cry and plunged after the white men. Fire spat from the yards and Old Billy, with revolver and cutlass, pressed forward.

As if at a signal, the cannibals became panic-stricken and started for the side. Pell-mell and headlong scores of them dived into the water. But some of the warriors held their ground.

A sudden rush to the side and a blow from behind—Old Billy went down. Dick yelled a warning too late and with a gesture and a cry to Nina lifted her up so that the reaching native sailors a-top the deckhouse grabbed her arms and pulled her to safety. And as she left his arms Dick wheeled with up-raised knife to meet the cunning cannibal that had laid Old Billy for a time motionless on the deck.

He was not a big savage, but he had a hideous face and a big moon disk was on his chest. Dick ducked low to avoid the downward blow of the tomahawk—struck out—missed—and the next instant he had grabbed the arm that held the tomahawk and his own knife-arm was seized; he was at death-grips with the cannibal king.

The cannibal was crafty and alert, but Dick clung to him like a clamped vise. Nina snatched a rifle from one of the sailors but did not dare to shoot; the bullet would have been sent too near the boy she loved. She cried for the native sailors to jump down to his aid, but they were not Tongans.

The cannibal could not strike. Dick could not use his knife. They twisted and turned. Then the old savage, looking fore and aft, saw the danger he was in; his men were fleeing over the side and McSpadden and Summers were coming on with blow on blow.

Nearer and nearer the side the old king drew the boy. Then suddenly he lurched overboard.

Nina shrieked louder than if it were her own death she had been pulled to.

The water is very nearly as much the South Sea Islander's home as his hut, and the cunning old king thought the boy's grip would be easily broken and his head split under the water. But as he fell Dick sucked his lungs full of air. He was as much at home in the water as any islander. No sooner was he plunged into it than he wrapped his legs around the cannibal's waist and began squeezing as hard as he could; and down, down, down they sank together.

And Dick hung on, though his lungs began to ache and it seemed that he could not restrain his breath another moment. He set his teeth, but he did not shut his eyes. Then it seemed that his lungs must explode in the next instant; his ears roared and a black fog came into his eyes; but stubbornly he winked his lids and kept his eyes open. He knew the cannibal, too, was in great pain—and it would be the first to yield that would die.

The old cannibal had not gained his kingship and held it with craft all those years for nothing. He was wily and quick as a fish. Suddenly he dropped his tomahawk, released his grip on Dick's wrist and, prying with both hands—at the same time expelling the air from his own lungs—began to sink even deeper. The unexpectedness of the move let him break away. At once with overhand strokes he began shooting toward the surface of the water.

Dick, fiercely stroking with his legs and one arm and as used to using his eyes under water as in twilight, streaked upward as a shark rises, and like a shark he turned on his back so that the cannibal was above and breast-down to him.

Out of the water they came together, almost breast to breast. Dick's upraised hand swept down, ripping the savage from short rib to thigh. And Nina saw, and McSpadden saw, and even Old Billy, having limped to the side, had looked down to where Nina pointed.

The last of the cannibals who were able

to run had leaped from the waist of the ship almost as soon as their king toppled overboard.

The fight was over. The native sailors continued to fire at the savages in the water; but the white men stood looking down at the vague shapes barely visible under it, fascinated by the strangeness of the duel.

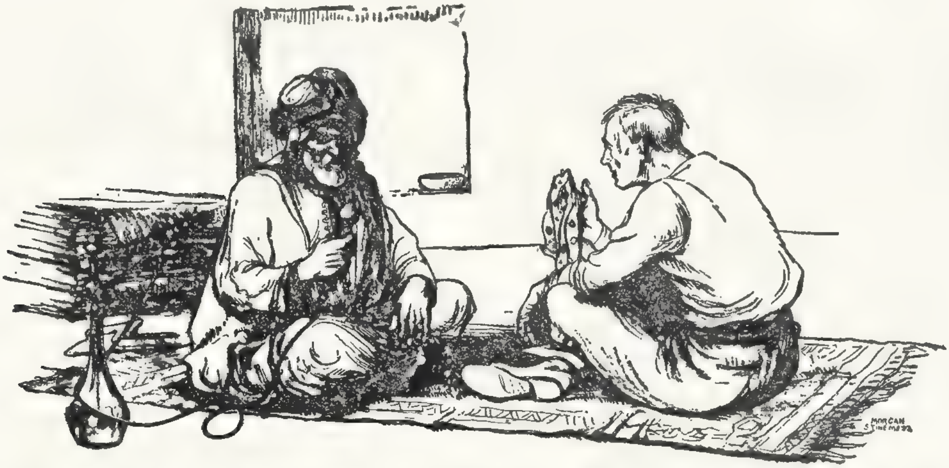
Dick puffed once or twice; then with long strokes he reached the side and scrambled up a line that Captain McSpadden himself held. And when he reached the deck the captain's arm went around his shoulder and his great hoarse voice cried huskily:

"Great God, boy! Who—who—in the —— ever called you a coward!"

AND that night, as the *White Wing* plowed along in the moonlight to look for a more friendly village to trade with, Dick and Nina nestled together in the shadow of the long-boat and overheard Captain McSpadden say to Mr. Summers:

"I'm gettin' along in years, you know, and in three or four I'll be ready to drop anchor. I can give him half-interest in *White Wing*, and it'll be pretty nice to have a son-in-law like him workin' for me. Nobody'll dare monkey with his ship!"

Then Captain McSpadden pulled down his right eye in an elaborate and prolonged wink and jerked his head in the direction of the long-boat, where two forms were merged into one shapeless shadow.



The Brightest Jewel of them All

A Complete Novelette — by S.B.H. Hurst

Author of "Bumps," "The Age Old Puzzle," etc.

CALCUTTA drowsed to the intense heat, the hottest hour of the day—between two and three in the afternoon. Those Europeans who had to be abroad traveled in covered vehicles and wore immense solar hats. Natives slipped along unconcerned and wore no hats—unless they wore them for ornament.

This business of carriages and hats describes the majority. Necessarily, there were exceptions—generally sailors, ashore from the many sailing vessels moored along the river, who had either obtained liberty or "cleared out." These sought native dives furnishing the two amusements, with a species of music added—as a sort of aural advertisement.

Among these exceptions were yet other exceptions. Men who were not sailors; men, even, who had lived in Calcutta for a long time, unattractive specimens.

among these one who realized that an excellent disguise is to act unexpectedly. He had no need to be out in the sun—so he went out in the sun. He could afford a conveyance—so he walked. Usually, in fact always, he dressed well—therefore, he was shabby. Invariably clean shaven, now he presented an unkempt appearance. And he walked swiftly.

To the occasional policeman he was one of the sailors from the ship. To the sailors he was anything or nothing at all. To curious natives he might be a gone-native Englishman—a good man to avoid. To himself he was a man engaged upon a very important enterprise, about which he had no desire to be communicative. If successful, there was money in it. Had he gone upon his adventure later in the day he would have been missed from his usual haunts, and he did not wish to raise the least breath of suspicion by taking that chance. Earlier in the day would have been just as inconveniently conspicuous. Thus, much as he disliked it, he was compelled, or believed he was, to travel the streets of Calcutta when travel was most unpleasant. Of course, he may have been merely egotistical—merely have imagined his absence would create comment and breed suspicion. He was aware even of this.

Indeed, he believed that he had taken into account everything. He wanted to be quite sure that he left no trail. And, whatever his reason for walking during the hot hour, it was not business of an European nature. He seemed to be careful to avoid the districts where white men did their business and presently plunged into a maze of narrow streets, lined with little native shops and houses, with the many-odored smell of the place intensified by the heat—which increased as the streets became narrower.

Yet, if any one had followed him, it would have seemed to such that he was engaged only upon a very innocent errand, and his unusual hour for making it, as well as his unusual appearance, would have been attributed, the first to a newly discovered eccentricity and the other to a natural wish to lead native pickpockets astray by his apparent poverty. For he stopped at the doorway of a native blacksmith, where the blast from the forge mingling with the sun-heat made a veritable next-life of temperature; and the blacksmith looked at him without friendliness or recognition, as he would have looked at any unpromising white stranger, and went on with his work after a slight mutter of an uncomplimentary nature.

"There are three legs on my horse," the white man spoke Hindustani, "and it needs a fourth. Do you make legs for crippled horses?"

The effect of this idiotic speech upon the smith was peculiar. He neither laughed nor threw things, he neither suspected the stranger of being drunk or insane—hot as it was, he never thought of the effect of sunstroke. He had been waiting for those words to be addressed to him for some time, but they came from so unexpected a person that he dropped his hammer in amazement and danced around the shop in agony, because the heavy tool fell on his bare toes.

The white man laughed, but as his face was lacking in change of expression the native did not know just what the laugh implied, even if his natural suspicions were justified.

"It was written," he said sullenly, partly to elicit some clarifying remark from the white man and partly to excuse his surprize-induced clumsiness.

"Yes—"the white man's face was still unmoved—"it was written. But tell me about the horse."

"It is a crippled horse, you said?" The native had at last become as placid as his visitor.

"I said so—and do you doctor such horses?"

"It depends upon their color," responded the native with entire equanimity.

"So; and mine is a black horse—all black is my horse," gravely answered the white man."

"Of what age is he?"

"She is a mare, five years old, the dam of two colts."

"A valuable animal, eh?"

"Some may think so!"

"One would go far to buy such a horse?"

"Farther if on her back."

The native leaned close to the white man, after a hurried glance around.

"Five doors to the right when you come to the second street to the left after leaving this place, *sahib!*" he whispered and at once returned to his anvil, hammering violently.

But almost before the native's hammer had commenced its resounding clatter the white man was on his way, walking along the left side of the street hastily—dodging men and animals with more or less success, leaving a trail of bad language behind him of which he took no notice.

AND as he walked it came to him—as if he were a dust mote blown over it—that the hum all about was the sound made by the great loom, weaving mystery, with men and women its threads, after the ancient and encyclopædic patterns stolen by Calcutta from every city in the world. The swiftly moving shuttle lay like the panorama of a factory with its roof removed so that he could view it, drenched in desire, colored with a million passions, shot by loves and hates. And the most complex pattern, the deepest mystery, the most sinister design was being woven swiftly in a corner of the factory.

The man shook his head and the vision vanished. Once again he was pushing his way through the crowded, narrow streets, men and women cursing him as he jolted them. But he knew all the same that the just-seen loom in the corner, weaving the most wonderful pattern, was "five doors to the right when you come to the second street to the left after leaving this place!"

And it had drawn him—a lure he could not resist—as a magnet draws iron filings. He no longer needed profit from his hours of living—he had enough to spend them in amusement, in idleness. But what amusement could equal this? What sport offered such thrilling risks? What gamble that was not as tame as pitch and toss with pennies compared to this—when his very association with the other threads of the mysterious pattern meant, if it were known to the authorities, his speedy arrest and, without doubt, lengthy imprisonment? Oh, well, he had been a free man for a month—and very tiresome had he found it! But that, no doubt, was because he had also been respectable!

And the pattern woven of human passions—and he only saw one tiny plot of the weave—was that of the virile, changing, colorful doings of the criminal societies of India, which touches and affects every one of the two hundred million crawlers on the face of the Queen of the East.

For the criminal in India does not work alone. In fact, he could not—and live. So from time immemorial there have been criminal societies. Lesser and greater societies and within them different degrees—from the entered apprentice of crime to the past grand master. And, again, a society so exclusive that membership in it is regarded as being a patent of nobility. And this somewhat shabby white man, shouldering his way through the tangle of humanity after a short but weird interview with a native smith who had no need to work but who craved an excitement which he could not cull from respectable living, now, after a month of freedom following his release from the Andaman penal colony, sought admission to any one of these societies which would have him.

It seemed a sordid ambition, but the craving for criminal excitement demanded satisfaction. Besides, although one of the most clever of white criminals, these native societies were new to him. Until his incarceration at the Andamans he had merely heard of them. In the beginning he had been an officer in an English cavalry regiment, bearing the name Menzies; but the majority of the years of his life had been spent in adventurous criminality—and very remarkable years had they been. He had been taken to the Andamans under peculiar circumstances—but that is by the way. While there, he had been in charge of the boat carrying the milk between the islands, having under him a dozen natives, whom he found excuses for changing frequently.

Some were lazy, some were untrustworthy and he feared some might poison the milk. Being the only white convict and having once been a "gentleman," he was accorded much kindness and consideration, and whenever he asked to be allowed to discharge a helper and take on another man no difficulty was made about obliging him—and no one suspected his real reason.

Now it is fairly well known that life convicts at the Andamans manage in some mysterious manner to communicate with their friends at home, but the Government has never found out how this is done. Neither does the Government know very much about the different native criminal societies. All this, of course, was known to Menzies, who, being a criminal, obtained the confidence of the criminals who worked for him and who, expecting release, promised to do certain things in exchange for certain information.

He was therefore enabled to learn all

about the criminal societies from his helpers, and when one had told him all he knew he discharged him, to learn more from that one's successor. It was all very simple. Menzies left the Andamans in possession of knowledge never before given to any white, after promising certain things. To his credit—or perhaps he was too wise to do otherwise—he kept his promises, but he found it increasingly difficult to keep his promise to himself—never again to engage in crime and not to put into use that wonderful knowledge he had gained from the other convicts. So one hot afternoon—after becoming established in Calcutta as an independent gentleman—he went for the walk, gave the right knock to the smith on outer guard and proceeded. The smith, through that underground channel of information mentioned, had expected a white man to do this—for why would the native convicts at the Andamans think the white man would mend his ways?

AS WELL try to describe a picture by making a list of the different colors composing it as to attempt to take the words and show them as of moving humanity, the strange-shaped houses and shops, the smells, the colors, the sky—but the mazy lanes of the city of Calcutta baffle analogy.

Men and women of all stations from every part of India jostled and chattered, and every scent known to earth ascended through the heavy, steamy air to a heaven that had become immune to it. Dogs, composed of every known breed and several as yet unclassified by science, snapped and bit at scraps and heaps of offal and cringed from threatening bare feet.

The blended howl of thousands of voices blurred into an orchestral hymn, athwart which shot the long-drawn cry of a peddler of sweets and little cakes. Bells clanged into an angry discord of different creeds, and among that medley of created humans a seeker might well have wondered if the potter's hand had not slipped all the time—or else his own image savored of a humility much overdone.

But, then, Menzies was on his way to the fifth door to the right, down that second street, and his going had to be indicated.

He was somewhat surprized when he came to the place—that is, he was surprized for a moment; the next moment he understood, and admired greatly. Because, in that anything but Christian land, far from the printing-presses kept running by the contributions of the devout of Western lands, the fifth door turned out to be a small shop devoted to selling just one article—the Holy Bible in various dialects and languages!

Naturally, it was not largely patronized. Passing followers of the only true faith spat contemptuously if they happened to understand the nature of the ware exhibited, and few even stopped to look, much less to buy, from curiosity.

That the Universal Bible Printing Company, or whoever owned the shop, had been beguiled into establishing an agency there was obvious to Menzies, and he did not doubt that the agent every now and then found a very different use for the pages of his books than that they were intended for, but who nevertheless remitted the exact amount of their cost, less his commission, to some branch manager.

The thing was clever. What policeman would suspect the place? And, if suspected, what a multitude of clerical witnesses to his character could the devout young shopkeeper produce! For he was quite young—perhaps thirty—and, what was even more remarkable, he was a Eurasian.

What was remarkable was that the criminal society should trust a Eurasian, should have one for their guard—for back of the store was a meeting-place, a place, also, where the pursued thief could seek sanctuary.

It was not the most fashionable society. Its number was seven. But Menzies had been told that only by passing through—by being passed through by the members of number seven could he reach to the one that had no number at all. This was part of a very intricate system.

"I want to buy a Bible," Menzies explained blandly in English.

"Yes, sah."

The clerk did not meet his eyes, but Menzies felt that in some marvelous fashion the fellow was looking straight through him and memorizing him completely.

"What kind of Bible?"

"The Holy Bible, of course, you *puggil*"

"How do I know that?" The clerk changed to Hindustani.

"By this text, which concerns the *budmash wallas* (wicked men)," in Hindustani.

Then, in English, " 'Where thieves can not break through or steal.' "

The clerk grinned.

"And how did you enjoy your stay at the islands, *sahib?*" he asked familiarly.

"*Chup!*" the reply came sharply, for Menzies never joked or became familiar with underlings. "Shut up—you know who I am. Now take me to your master and don't try to be smart!"

The Eurasian became humble—part of it due to fear, part assumed. He dropped the curtain in front of the store and Menzies followed him into the half dusk. The place had a smell different from that of the street, always to be found where many books are kept closely confined and said to be caused by a microbe. The password given him to this second place had been something of a puzzle to him—now he felt annoyed at having been so slow witted as not to have deduced the Bible shop, about which places every native in India has weird opinions, not the least weird being those of the Christian-*wallas*.

They passed through the shop and out into a small yard dividing the back of the shop from the wall of a dwelling. Crossing this, they reached a door, which the Eurasian opened. The door opened into an empty room, which again opened into another yard. This led them to a street filled with people. They turned to the left, walked a few yards and reached a rug-seller's shop. The proprietor, an elderly man, sat on the floor among his rugs, smoking a hubble-bubble. To this man the Eurasian made a quick sign, turned and hurried back to his Bibles.

Menzies, who had a good head for locality, knew that this rapid "cutting across lots" had brought him at least five streets from the Bible shop. No doubt the society had learned, from a far different standpoint, however, the dictum of a great philosopher—that a change of venu generally alters the verdict. Without a word—merely returning the bow of the other man —the ex-convict sat down native fashion upon another rug and for a while the two regarded each other gravely.

Menzies was very hot. His clothes clung to him. He was also thirsty and not a little tired. But he was thoroughly enjoying himself and tried to believe it was comfortable to sit as he was sitting. As a matter of fact, it was probably hotter in the shop than in the sun, although there was no dust. From outside—just across a pile of rugs—the roar of the stream of life flowing past smote the ear like the rushing of a cataract.

But the white can not even imitate the eternal patience of the East. Menzies began to wonder how long his host would continue to play the part of an image of Buddha. A long whisky peg haunted his imagination. His mouth was too dry to enjoy a smoke, although he wanted to drown the smell of the hubble-bubble with something more nearly approaching tobacco, as well as to soothe himself with the narcotic. Yet nothing could have moved him from the rug except a nearer step toward the inner circle of India's criminality. Again he was enjoying himself, even if the game had not really become exciting.

"I wonder if we can trust you?" The native's sudden words almost made the white man jump. He knew that his coming was expected and it followed as a corollary that he had been under surveillance ever since he arrived in Calcutta and likely enough had furnished food for discussion—concerning whether he would remain "straight" or again dally in the ways of the underworld. His admission to the councils apparently depended upon his being able to make the other man believe he could be trusted—the ban against white men having been lifted for his benefit for the first time in history.

Without hesitation he assured his host that he could be trusted to the death—making the mental reservation that he would withdraw unless he saw both entertainment and profit, and having no fears about his ability to pit his will against all the criminal societies in India if he felt like doing so. For Menzies was as devoid of fear as he was of scruples. But it was obvious that he was not to be allowed to join any society merely to commit some ordinary crime—the members were not altruists, were quite capable of doing their business without his assistance and would not admit him unless they were unable to bring to a satisfactory conclusion some plan of importance if he were not admitted.

It must be a big and unusual thing which they had for him to do, he thought, feeling gratified at the sense of his own importance —a feeling only explained in so clever a man by the fact of his hitherto having worked almost entirely alone, and by the craving to gratify his desire for excitement which made him forget that to an English officer the natives were a lower race.

"Very well, then," the native spoke English without a trace of accent, unless that of Oxford, where he had been educated, can be called so, "you can now consider yourself one of us, although—"he stared shrewdly at Menzies—"you can hardly expect to be admitted to the council controling any society until you have proved your willingness to obey that council and also proved you have no intention of betraying it.

"Words are easily spoken—we require acts as security. You no doubt pride yourself upon your skill, and we will give you an opportunity to prove it. The king will be in Delhi in two weeks from today. The matter on hand will be eaiser for you than for a native. You are to possess yourself of whatever of the crown jewels his Majesty brings with him from England—and I understand the most valuable will be brought, because of its being thought necessary to impress us with the wealth of them when compared to the great display of such things which will be worn by the native rajahs at the Durbar.

"As you know, it will be the first time an English king has been crowned Emperor of India in the city of Delhi. Get the jewels, which have never been successfully taken from the Tower of London—in spite of a yarn to the contrary. You can ask for all the help you wish, and—remember this, for it will be perhaps expected of you as an additional proof that you can be trusted—should you receive further orders calling upon you to do more than merely steal the jewels, you must not fail us."

"What further orders?" Menzies was puzzled.

"None as yet. I merely mentioned them in the event of it being considered necessary to give them. I am only trying to make you see how imperative it is for you to be at all times willing to obey—only by obedience can you win to command."

And the native dismissed him with the regality of a monarch.

THE white man went home, disappointed at having penetrated so little a distance into the maze of criminal societies, wondering who the devil the man in the rug-shop might be, a little concerned as to his genuineness, and somewhat awed by the magnitude and the risk of the task set him.

But an excellent dinner put him in better spirits. Here, at last, was a gamble which would furnish excitement. What other gamble could furnish more? To steal the crown jewels from the reigning king! A king for whom he had little loyalty and no affection. But was the thing possible? Didn't it seem that the native criminals had realized the task was beyond them, and that they were using him as a catspaw with which to make the attempt? Aware of his release from the Andamans, of the knowledge he had obtained from the native convicts, was it not likely that they wanted to get him out of the way because he knew too much, knew more than any white man had ever known?

He dismissed this idea. If the societies had merely wanted to get rid of him, an assassin could have been procured for ten *rupees* or less.

And the craving to do the thing grew on him. It is as impossible to describe the state of mind of the criminal—who does not steal because of need but because he needs to steal—as it is to understand it. It can hardly be called the sporting instinct which drives him, although Menzies found the gratification of his gambling desire in crime. Neither does there seem to be any wish to harm society as a whole or the individual who becomes the victim. There is something childish about it all—witness the pride of the safe-cracker over the pickpocket—and, of course, weakness.

Menzies was a brave, clever, fairly rich man. Yet he practically crawled to a native in order to become a member of a criminal society and felt no annoyance at being ordered to prove himself "worthy," and no distaste at obeying orders from members of a race he really believed to be his inferior. He began to use all his cunning and knowledge in making and rejecting various plans. It was as if he played a game of chess with possibilities, and one of his first decisions was to determine to disguise himself as a Eurasian after registering in Delhi at some hotel under an assumed English name.

Then he decided to ask the man in the rug shop for a mob of about a hundred ordinary-looking natives, who would, of course, be criminals, and among whom he could, if necessary, lose himself. But all these ways and means were simple compared to the actual stealing and the time of doing it. Would it be best to make the attempt during the great procession, or when the king was likely to be among the smallest number of people—say just prior to his leaving the vice-regal palace? Or would it be best to attack the custodian of the jewels—if he could be accurately located—when the king was not present? Or to try to crack the safe in which they reposed during the night? There was the difficulty of finding just where they would be kept. When the king was wearing them, with the great scepter in his hand, would seem to shorten the job. But that would be hedged in by innumerable difficulties, although the excitement engendered by the king's apparent danger would be of help. After two days spent in seeking a workable plan Menzies understood why the job had been given to him. He was one of the cleverest crooks in the world—the job was beyond the native societies. What, then, would be his share of the loot? He reflected that it would be time enough to think of that when he had the jewels—not to speak of the trouble of disposing of them.

By this time he was absorbed by the problem. Morality and danger were outside the affair—the problem was to get the jewels. He forgot everything but the problem, as does the solver of a chess problem. But he did not forget to make his journey to Delhi as inconspicuous as possible—taking with him a letter to a certain man, which was given him by the supposed seller of rugs who eternally smoked the hubble-bubble.

THE train carried him to his destination—a veritable trip through an inferno, for it was the hot season. But his problem kept him from troubling greatly about the temperature, as it did from studying the people.

Menzies was growing cheerful, for his problem was approaching solution. And with the approach of this solution his pride in himself caused him to wonder why he should be faithful to the society, of which he knew practically nothing.

All his life he had worked alone, and he was practically doing so now—the assistance given him being nothing compared to the task which was his. Why not, if successful, disappear with the jewels? If he were not discovered he could find some way of getting rid of them.

But as he did not need the money, why not keep them? This notion gave him much satisfaction. He, a private citizen, in possession of the crown jewels of the British Empire. And when he died he would arrange for their return to the crown. He visioned this delightful bequest. The greatest criminal in all the history of crime leaving, at his death, the crown jewels to their owner. He imagined the headlines in the newspapers. Of course, he would not be able to read them. But why not? Why not, after a reasonable time, when all hope of their recovery had vanished—why should he not pretend to die, after making his will? Then he would be able to read all about himself and about his wonderful bequest. By Jove, he would do it! Damn the native societies. What had they done, after all? He was doing all the work. Therefore, he was entitled to all there was in it.

He would retire to some quiet place. Then "die," leaving the long-lost jewels to the crown.

He gloated over the prospect. What fun he would have reading the papers after his "demise." He was certainly the most wonderful man that had ever lived. Never before had such a conception come into a man's mind. And he of all the world's criminals—"adventurers" was the word he used—was the only one with sufficient skill to do the job.

Thus, this became his settled plan: after getting possession of the jewels he would forget the man in the rug shop and what help he had given him and get away. The societies would, of course, try to find him, wanting revenge; but he was too clever for them. Then, in after years, the newspapers filled with news of him and the restoration of the jewels.

But first to interview the rug-seller's friend in Delhi. The appointment was for night, and Menzies kept it in a mood that was a reaction from the anything but cordial reception given him by the rug-seller—a mood further stimulated by his decision to retain the fruits of his labors. But he needed all the help he could get and was too much of a diplomat to allow his feelings to interfere with business.

The city was crowded—more than ever so. It was the event of her history, this coming of the king. Not that she had not known kings. She had—hundreds of them. But this one was the king-emperor, the Burra *sahib* of all the *sahibs*, the Râj itself. Therefore, men from every part of the country had come to Delhi. Retainers by the score of native princes, rajahs and such. Dealers of wares from the provinces—curiously ignorant of the fact of it being possible to buy their produce more cheaply than they themselves could afford to bring and sell it.

But perhaps the profession most heavily represented in the influx was that to which Menzies had devoted his life. The city was filled with every kind of criminal—even bearded horse-stealers had filtered in from the north—and every one of the different societies had judiciously shifted its headquarters, because, like every other class, the police had multiplied.

And Delhi by night, even a hot night, has about her the lure of a fairy tale. There is not the seething intrigue of Calcutta but in its place is a topsy-turvy unexpectedness, a displacement of the normal which, however inconvenient it may be at times, has a charm. Then the city is so old.

Calcutta has no city gates through which the armies of centuries have marched and which still seem to echo with their tramp, as is the case with Delhi. And from the tiny tower windows what bright eyes have waited for the return of the conquerer or wept for the bringing back of the body of the vanquished? If only those night-shadowy places could tell their tales—could again reflect the emotions that have vibrated among them!

Even Menzies, on crooked business bent, felt the spell of the place and caught himself growing grave under the veneration it inspired, although he was no stranger to the capital. Besides, there was a memory—for all men love. With a curse that merged into what sounded suspiciously like a groan, he put aside the spiritual for the material. He could not afford to dally with the nebulous when the jewels of Britain were his destined prey.

He had taken great care to throw the authorities off his track—believing that his departure from Calcutta would have been noticed by the police and his subsequent movements noted, even if in some quarters his statement about settling down to a decent life had been accepted as truth.

On the train he adopted the name of McLean, labeled his luggage accordingly and gave strict orders to his servant—a new one hired for the trip—to tell all inquirers that he was on his way to England, merely going to Delhi to view the *durbar*.

At the hotel in Delhi he registered as McLean, but before keeping his appointment that evening he had disguised himself as a rather shabby Eurasian, registered under the name of De Silva at another hotel patronized exclusively by Eurasians, taking there a worn suitcase but leaving his regular luggage and servant at the first hotel.

He thus had two places where he could claim residence and use for changing the various disguises he might have to adopt. So rapid was he at changing his appearance that he was able to leave his palatial rooms at the first hotel, walk down-stairs to the wash-room as McLean and hurriedly leave the wash-room two minutes later as De Silva without being observed.

The suitcase he bought on his way to the other hotel. Thus as De Silva he pushed through the crowds, although he never forgot his part and never presumed to brush against a white man. Even an intimate acquaintance would have taken him for some Portuguese interpreter recently arrived from Goa.

Having taken the precaution of turning his possessions into negotiable bonds and notes, which were sewed in a belt he wore, he felt the heat more than his dirty white suit and supposed singlet would have necessitated—for in such a climate a few extra ounces of clothing make a difference.

His perspiration and his mood made him irritable and he was in no humor for the diplomatic task ahead of him. But he was a marvel of self-control, and even if he did lack their patience he felt able to handle any native living.

DOWN a narrow street, once in the dim ages gone an animal track down to the Jumna River, now shadowy with the ancient walls built high to guard unguessable secrets, Menzies made his way very slowly; never pausing until he reached the worn steps leading to the water of the stream, where even at that hour a few *dhobees* were washing their linen against stones.

There he stood, collecting himself for the coming interview; ticking off the various points to be gone into, the agreements to be made, the number of assistants needed and everything that made for his plan.

As he thought, he stared vaguely at the slowly moving river, shot with the faint curiosity of a wan but inquiring moon and noisy with dingy *wallas*.

Again he found the glamour of the old city creeping into his calculations—even found himself wondering about the many souls that had drifted down the stream, either whole or in ashes, from the burning *ghats*. He felt curiously superstitious and once could have sworn that the faces of the dead and gone discarded favorites of the kings of Delhi were staring at him from the ripples made in the river by passing boats. Why the ex-favorites he could not guess; but for some reason they, of all the river's dead, had risen to taunt him.

He shook his head angrily. What an absurd idea! What had got into him, that he should be thinking of such things? He, an active man, engaged upon a great enterprise, to be thinking of death! He turned away from the Jumna but the feeling of superstition clung to him like a cloak he could not discard. With a vast effort he forced a laugh and lit a cigar.

Yet in spite of all his will-power, in spite of all he could do to prevent himself, he again turned to watch the water, and again he could have sworn that he saw the faces of the once lovely women looking at him with eyes that plainly pitied. At whatever part of the river he directed his gaze, there were the faces. He felt his pulse. It was rapid, but while he might be getting a fever he was fair enough to own up to the fear that had gripped him. Then he resolutely turned away and managed not to look back.

Yet the echo of the Peacock Throne went with him when he walked—the echo of the dead voices of those dead faces who had looked at him—until he felt that he was walking through a picture of old days. The dark, shadowy walls gave way to bright colors, the throng of neutral-colored people became courtiers; and everywhere were the women—who looked at him with eyes of sympathy.

The feeling went, but it left Menzies so shaken that he almost decided to postpone his interview. Only his pride drove him to keep it. And the joy he had expected, the thrill of the gamble, was not in him, and he was conscious of the curious notion that he ought to be able to exorcise the entire experience by fixing his mind upon the historical fact of the Peacock Throne's being carried away from Delhi by Nadir Shah in about 1730. Then, to his horror, he became very vividly aware that he had been observed by the favorites of kings who had never sat on that throne—how, he did not know. Then the homely realization that he was getting mixed brought him back nearly to normal. With, however, the cloud hanging over him of having touched something chilly, something beyond the veil.

But the grotesquely fat *babu*, who was at once a clerk in a Government office, a civil servant and the representative of the criminal societies, was at least sufficiently material to dispel any lingering touch of the occult. He met Menzies in the outer parlor of a lady with whom Mrs. Grundy would not have spoken, to reach which the Englishman had to walk up a winding stone stairway that led around the thick stone walls like the defense of battlements, leading to a door of medieval stoutness, where a sinister bearded guard catechised him unsparingly before allowing him to enter. And answering the ritual served further to irritate, until the apparently shabby Eurasian was in such a towering rage that his disguise would not have deceived a small native child.

The most muscial of laughters broke his stream of swear-words and the Englishman turned with a start, his nerves twittering, to find a tiny Parsee lady, almost as white as an European, among the shadows at his elbow. So greatly had the vision on the water of the Jumna affected him that he very rudely pinched the lady to make sure she was real—a form of greeting, however, which she accepted in good part as being quite in conformance with the etiquette of the house.

But the scandalized and much astonished Affridi did not intend any half-caste should call him the direct descendant of several herds of swine, and he pushed between the girl and Menzies with the view of separating the man for a well-merited chastisement. His surprise when he found himself so cunningly gripped that he could not act broke from him in gasping and bastard Hindustani, which gave the girl further cause for merriment.

"*Puggi,*" whispered Menzies hoarsely. "Haven't you enough brains to understand that a gentleman may need to come here looking like something else? Get back to your door, you water buffalo; the lady does not relish the scent of you!"

Then the dense man from the north realized what a child would have realized much sooner—that Menzies' individuality belied his appearance—and with a muttered apology he walked out of the passage.

"So?" The lady's tantalizingly tiny hands fondled Menzies' anything but clean coat-sleeve. "So you are the clever Englishman expected, eh? I knew it at once. Don't you think you had better change your color? This one neither hides you nor improves you. When your face was under the door-lamp I saw your eyes. No Eurasian ever had eyes like yours. If that hillman wasn't all fool and could think of more than drink and women, he would have known at once that you were not what you pretended to be. Come, *sahib*—come with me and change your coat and drink some real whisky."

"But I have to meet a man here," protested Menzies.

"Let the fat Government clerk wait for his betters. Besides, am I not more entertaining?"

"Much more." By this time Menzies was smiling back at her, and wishing the light were stronger. "You are much more entertaining but hardly so profitable," he replied.

"Being less of a fool than the *babu*, I pay all my dividends to myself," she retorted briskly. "But, then, I can ply my trade alone—he needs your help!"

Native repartee, as between man and woman, is in about the same stage of development as that of England was in the time of Henry the Eighth; consequently its most scintillating gems are quite unprintable. Strange it is that the literature of the country runs so much to religious-philosophy and so little to the form of Boccaccio. Yet, again, it is not so strange.

Foot by foot, as he talked with the lady, Menzies had edged along the passage, until they had reached the curtains of two rooms. From the one ahead—the outer parlor—came a babble of conversation; from the one to the right came nothing—it indicated the silence of a vast discretion. The lady quietly drew the curtain of the silent room sufficiently aside for one to pass, revealing a subdued ruby light that played with the mysterious patterns of many tapestries and invitingly pointed out divans of grateful softness and comfort. A large silver water-pipe spread its tubes about the heavy floor-rug like some strange species of octapus that had been converted into the ways of peace. And as Menzies looked, a small maid apparently materialized from the scented air or slipped out of one of the pictures of the tapestries—to stand, bowing silently, before him, with hands that eloquently demanded his hat.

For a moment—as an antidote to the vision of the river—he was tempted to dally. Then he laughed. It was all too palpable—the heads of the criminal society had sent this temptress to divert him from the path of strict business. It was another of their infernal tests.

He trembled with rising anger. As the most skilful criminal in India, he should have been welcomed into the inner circle of the societies; instead of which he was being treated like the veriest tyro in crime. It was all very well not to change the eternal customs—India is the most conservative country on earth—but, for all that, he resented it.

Almost roughly he shook off the delicate, restraining hands and pushed through the curtain ahead—into a large room, heavy with the smoke of mixed, vile tobacco.

The babble of talk ceased suddenly and twenty pairs of eyes were fixed upon the newcomer, who stood for perhaps a minute getting his bearings and trying to judge of the feelings of the crowd by the different breathings—an old trick of his. Then he heard a light laugh from the passage and knew that the strange Parsee lady was telling him she appreciated his strength.

HIS eyes became accustomed to the light of the room and through the fog of smoke he made out a diversity of criminals—presided over by the fat native gentleman—*babu*—before mentioned. For the most part their features were so repulsive that one might have believed that they had been sent back from the underworld—refused admittance by the devil. But what struck Menzies most unfavorably was the lack of intelligence those faces exhibited. Only a low cunning, mixed with the vilest cruelty and most vicious habits—such was all the Englishman could deduce, and he was a skilled physiognomist. So these were the men he wished to be associated with. He became suddenly disgusted with himself, and while he tried to assure himself that the men in the room were only the riffraff of the societies—the sort he had known at the Andamans—and that the heads were men of intelligence, he found no comfort or surcease from his disgust in that assurance. Again, the creatures—whom he could not ask to have dismissed—would hear his plans, which jarred. He didn't mind them knowing the plans—as members of the society they would know them eventually, anyhow—but the feeling of telling them, like a schoolboy at graduation, before such an audience hurt his pride. He was an exclusive criminal. But there was no way out. Perhaps they lacked the wit to follow him properly.

"Well?"

He spoke shortly, irritated by the staring as well as by his discovery.

"Ah, *sahib*."

The *babu* laboriously heaved himself from his cushion and advanced with a waddling gait, extending his hand.

"So you know who I am?"

Menzies was forced to be diplomatic and shake hands.

"Ah, yas—you are the veree clever chap who got away from Andamans by a trick, eh?"

"Never mind that. What I came here for was to arrange, I believe with you, about something else." And he handed the *babu* the letter given him by the old seller of rugs in Calcutta.

The *babu's* face creased into a cavernous series of grins but he did not offer to read the letter. Instead, he slipped it carelessly among the folds of his linen and indicated a cushion as a seating-place for Menzies.

"Why don't you read the letter?" the latter demanded as he sat down.

"Oh," the *babu* laughed, "do you think we would trust anything to writing? No, sah, I was informed of your coming by a much more safe manner than a letter. And if you will suggest what is your plan, I will see if I can comply with it so far as to be of assistance to you."

Menzies found it difficult to keep his temper. Annoyed at having believed the letter meant anything, as well as by the attitude of the *babu*, he raised his voice.

"I have made my plan. If you don't like it you can say so—but I don't intend to alter it. Now, once and for all, I am going to boss this job. Make up your mind to that and—to furnishing me with at least a hundred men, all sworn to obey me, with three of them capable of acting the parts of native army officers—not non-coms."

As ever, his manner won. The *babu* wilted into a very complaisant fat man and promised to do as Menzies desired, and the Englishman took out his very carefully prepared notes of the great task of stealing the crown jewels of Britain, reading them to the *babu* and impressing upon him how important it was there be no mistake.

But the keystone of the arch—or the arch diplomacy through which Menzies meant to appropriate the loot—lay in the last sentence. In that it was stated that the jewels were to be passed by Menzies into the hands of an apparent *Sikh* guard, who in turn was to deliver them into the hands of the fat *babu* for safe-keeping—the latter gentleman to be waiting under his umbrella at a certain place in the vice-regal grounds. As a matter of fact, Menzies had very different intentions.

But they parted friends, the *babu* actually believing that the "fool Englishman" intended to "play fair," as all the English had the habit of doing.

Glad to get away from the company and out of the smoke, Menzies stood breathing deeply in the passage and felt a light touch on his arm.

"It's only me," whispered the Parsee lady as he started. "Come in a moment—let me tell your fortune."

The lure of her adorable English alone would have been enough to induce him to accept her invitation, but there was more than that in it for the man—she also appealed to him like a delicious antiseptic, ready to wash and neutralize the bad taste left in his mouth by the interview in the other room. And as he followed her past the curtain—a curtain as inviolable as an iron-barred door—a troupe of the lowest order of *bebees* filed up the passage for the entertainment of the gang of criminals.

* * *

WITH a sigh of relief Menzies sank among the cushions, while the girl prepared the drink he so badly needed. He forgave her the part she had played in trying to entice him from the strict letter of what the societies considered his duty. After all, she was a woman, and she had done him no harm—he could even believe that if he had accepted her invitation prior to the interview—which lasted nearly three hours—she would have warned him, and advised him to go to the fat *babu*.

And then he began to wonder about her. Was she only just what she appeared to be? Never before had he heard of a Parsee woman in her profession. Mostly they lived together in Bombay, preserving themselves and their women from the contamination of the world. How had this young girl drifted from her people, to become the mistress of such a house in Delhi? He could understand, without egoism, she wished to entertain him—even dressed and colored as a Eurasian he was surely preferable to the other visitors. She brought the drink and sat down by his side, drawing his left hand to her.

For some minutes she studied it closely, he watching her humorously, until he saw that she was growing very grave—her eyes no longer flashed with fun but were filled with a very serious expression.

"What is it—what's the matter?" He was unpleasantly affected by her gravity—his feelings were reminiscent of the vision on the river.

"What did you make of there being all those dirty men in the room when you had your conference with the fat *babu?*" she asked suddenly.

"Oh, I didn't take much notice of them—supposed they were just hangers-on." He assumed indifference.

"Well, maybe. I trust you, for if they knew in there that I was warning you there would be another dead woman's body floating down the river!"

"Don't talk like that," he shuddered. "It's very good of you to tell me of your fears, but, all the same, I am able to take care of myself."

"Perhaps, but this is different. Those men in there are more powerful than even the heads of the societies—they know too much and have banded together so as to be powerful. They are using you."

He laughed lightly.

"They may think they are," he amended.

"I know all about it. You are to get the jewels of the king. Yes, that is the agreement, but I fear there is something else—something that you and I know nothing of, something forced upon the heads of the societies by that gang!"

"Do you read that in my hand?" he asked as lightly as he could.

"There is much trouble in your hand. Oh, I don't know why I should feel so much concern about you, but it is so. As one star shines for another, one bird sings to some bird it can not see—so does a woman mourn for a man who does not care for her, and risks her life to shield him!"

Menzies did not reply. He was wondering if the woman could be trusted. If he had been right in supposing that she had been sent to tempt him, why should she have so suddenly changed? Then, in a flash of comprehension, he understood that he had been mistaken—that she had not tried to wean him from his supposed duty, and that her laugh in the passage had been intended to disarm the suspicions of the conspirators.

She was his friend. He would trust that intuition above the most rigorous logic. Then what did it all mean? If the societies wanted to be rid of him because he knew too much, why had they taken so much trouble? Because they first wanted him to steal the jewels, which was beyond them. That was what his reason told him, but, somehow, he did not believe it. There was, as the girl hinted, something else. What could it be? After he got the jewels they meant to kill him. But he had no intention of turning over the jewels to them. Of course they did not know that. The suspicion of there being something he did not know about was upsetting him—he was getting mixed.

He sneered at himself. What did he care for a handful of dirty natives, except as they might be of use to him? He would go ahead as he had planned. In the meanwhile, the girl was a diversion.

But not a merry one. Whatever her history—and it was a strange one—she had lived in a manner little calculated to fit her to enjoy her latest venture, so that the coming of a man of refinement, such as Menzies was to her, bent her feelings toward him in the growth of easy love. Fully aware that honor among thieves was a fallacy, she guessed at the "something else" which was to be her new fancy's undoing. The fitful passion in her breast feared its sudden quenching, and she pleaded with the cause of it, after the manner of women.

"Your hand shows me that it were better for you to go away—to leave the king's jewels to the king, and go." It had been on the tip of her tongue to ask him to take her with him, but, her good sense showing her the absurdity of such a request, she went on unselfishly. "Yes, go away—back to England, where the fat *babu* and his dirty friends can not touch you. There is too much danger here in Delhi."

"There is always danger in taking jewels away from kings," he suggested, frowning at the freedom with which the plot had been discussed, "particularly when so many know about it."

"There you are wrong. They are not quite fools," she answered. "Because I know means nothing. I know all. But no other women are told. You don't know who my lover is or why I hate him."

"So!" Menzies dwelt on the word, comprehending. "And what will he say if he finds us together?"

"I don't care," she exclaimed recklessly.

"But I do," Menzies rose hurriedly, thankful for the sudden luminosity which had shown him so much of the woman and her relations with the fat *babu*.

He felt that he had dipped his hands into the abysmal depths of female personality, and that he had almost slipped in out of his depth. He had been saved by an exclamation! Not that he was afraid of the *babu's* jealousy, but of its complications. Did women enjoy deception more than truth? He was surprized she had not gone further. What a mix-up!

But he took his leave with many thanks for her kindness, after she had obtained a promise that he would call again at a more favorable time. Veering like the wind in the doldrums, she had switched from wishing him to save himself by going to England to desiring him to stay—all within five minutes. She even forgot to tell his fortune. Yet there was a grain of truth in her, as he found out later.

HE RETURNED to the Eurasian hotel and there changed into a white man—not wishing to chance being refused admittance to his rooms among decent people by reaching there in his present condition. He slept badly and woke to a day of planning. The following day Delhi was to witness the coronation of the king-emperor.

It wasn't such a complicated plan but it needed exactness in its working. So much for the ostensible part of it. Being an ex-military man, Menzies had naturally reverted to military methods. He had learned all about the guard at the palace and he was well aware of the jealousy of native pride, which demanded a native guard for the illustrious visitor. White soldiers there might be, but the immediate guard must be native—to have decided otherwise meant a slight, a want of trust in the loyalty of the Indian Empire. Consequently a Sikh guard was on "domestic" duty.

Meanwhile, with Menzies' written instructions to guide him, the fat *babu* had been exceedingly busy. To obtain a hundred ex-soldiers who were also criminals was an easy matter, but the three who were to act as officers had to be carefully chosen and coached. This necessitated a meeting between Menzies and the three. On the whole, he put in a busy day.

Then there was for Menzies a very important private matter to be arranged, which was intended to deviate the purloined jewels from the hungry umbrella of the fat *babu*—who was to be waiting in a selected spot for them. This matter took the form of paying a *gharry walla*—a cab driver—the large sum of a hundred *rupees*—large, that is, to the cabman, who had, of course, no idea of the part he was to play—to insure his being prompt, fairly honest, and silent. Much depended on this unsuspecting person. He was to be waiting at a corner three blocks from where the fat *babu* was to wait, well out of the early crowd, which might hinder rapid driving.

Menzies paid this person fifty *rupees* and promised him fifty more. After stealing the jewels, his plan was a run to the *gharry*—trusting to the excitement and his knowledge of the locality—reaching it in the character of a Sikh officer, with the jewels in his possession.

The driver was to be told to drive rapidly in the opposite direction to which Menzies wished to go. During the drive, the passenger intended to change his appearance again to that of a Eurasian, drop from the *gharry* without the driver knowing it and make his way to another cheap hotel—there to stay for a day or two. After which—when he thought it the right time—he meant to take a train to Benares. There he would become another white man, and so—home to England.

All this time the unhappy servant of the missing McLean would be waiting for his master to return to pay the hotel bill. The police would probably discover who

McLean really was—if they did not know already—and perhaps believe something had happened to him—Menzies hoped so, anyway. At any rate, he saw no better way to throw them off his track. So he was very particular about hiring what seemed like a competent *gharry walla*. And any *gharry walla* would be on time if he knew another fifty *rupees* was to be added to the fifty already paid, if he were. Neither would he forget to bring the small but important suitcase, which contained nothing more valuable than a white-duck suit and a solar hat, with which the giver of the *rupees* had entrusted him.

THE officer of the guard, a high-caste native, was not unduly surprized at the note—signed by his commanding officer, apparently—which bade him dismiss his command ten minutes earlier than he had expected, so that the men would have time to get breakfast and spruce up for the procession. The tall native officer who marched to the palace with his hundred men brought the note with him, as explaining his appearance. Everything was in order, the guard was changed and certain of the newcomers detailed to relieve the men on duty in the palace halls and passages. There was, also, a small guard of English soldiers, but these had nothing to do with the Sikhs.

Thus, with incredible ease, thanks to his knowledge of drill, the commanding officer's signature and his very efficient assistants, who had all left the army under a cloud and were being highly paid for their trouble—criminals all—Menzies obtained entrance to the palace.

Now, leaving one of his three officers with the majority of the false guard for appearance's sake, he rapidly made for where he had learned the jewels were kept, accompanied by his two remaining "officers." As they went the two natives exchanged significant glances, which Menzies did not observe.

But a hitch came. Of the four servants whom the societies, at Menzies' order, had managed to smuggle into the palace in place of four who were discharged—a much easier matter, this, than in Europe or America—one had been told to keep himself aware of the abiding-place of the jewels; another, to keep in touch with their immediate custodian; another, to keep as near the king as possible; and another, an *ayah*, to keep in touch with the queen.

At the foot of the great stairway—up and down which men and women were passing all the time—the first of the servants managed to get to the side of the officer apparently in charge of the native guards, and advise him in a hurried whisper that the king and queen were at that moment arraying themselves with the jewels—either for the procession or as a sort of rehearsal—in what had been called the Throne Room.

This entirely upset Menzies' plans. He had intended to act when neither the king or the queen were present. In short, his idea had been to bind and gag any one guarding the jewels who were not in his gang of hundred Sikhs.

He had expected to have to serve only one or two Europeans in this fashion, because he had succeeded in substituting his men for the real guards. Allowing fifteen minutes for the officer he had relieved to discover he had been tricked, Menzies meant to do some rapid safe-entering and get away before the robbery was discovered. To attempt the thing in any other manner looked suicidal—meant failure. Now, the jewels were no longer in the safe; and with the king and queen there would be at least a half-dozen people.

There might, also, be a servant or two—but he trusted his four importations to take care of them. However, with all the luck he could expect, he and his two ex-officers would have to bind and gag at least six people, including the king and queen. And three of these would no doubt be soldiers—generals—and armed.

What was he to do? In all his checkered career he had never thought so rapidly. He flushed under his dye—he was actually enjoying himself. What a huge lark! The extraordinary personality of the man pulsed at its highest. Figuring the risks—and even if he could grab the jewels, he saw no way of getting clear with them—he began to walk up the wide stairs, accompanied by his villainous companions. The servant conspirator had wisely disappeared.

They reached the door of the Throne Room, outside of which, with fixed bayonets, stood four of Menzies' guard. Not a one of the four flickered an eyelid when the three supposed officers approached them. They did not salute, only waited.

Menzies whispered rapidly and learned from the man to whom he spoke that the king and queen, two ladies and four gentlemen, all English, were in the room at the moment. There were, also, two footmen, English, and two English detectives, who had had charge of the jewels since they left England. In the room, then, were three women and nine men. Who the men were did not matter; no doubt the viceroy and the commander-in-chief were among them.

Menzies turned to the nearest of the fake officers:

"It's impossible. Even if we rushed that crowd in there—and with the four men here we could perhaps do it—they would make too much noise for us ever to get away!"

The idea of killing never entered Menzies' head. In all his career of crime he had never killed.

The two officers looked at one another. Then the most villainous spoke to Menzies.

"If you are not afraid to try it, we're not!" His tone was as insulting as his words, but Menzies was too level-headed to let words upset him at such a moment.

"It's absurd," he said shortly. "We could never get away. Best thing to do is to clear out—we may get another chance."

But he knew they would not get another chance. The fake guard—their one sure key to the palace—would be soon discovered, and they could never use it again. Again, the officers looked at one another. One of them grinned at the four men on guard, who grinned back. Astonished, Menzies was about to ask for an explanation, when the ugliest officer put his hand in his tunic, pulled out a letter and presented it to the Englishman.

Hurriedly, surprized, Menzies took the letter. It flashed upon him that there was hardly time to read it, that he would be better occupied making his getaway. Nevertheless, he opened it and read:

> It has come to our knowledge that the jewels are false. It was thought too risky to bring the real ones from England, so paste ones were manufactured. The test set for you, in place of appropriating the jewels—now known to be false—is to aid human liberty by killing both the king and queen. The men will help you to this glorious deed.
>
> R. D.
>
> P.S.—Do not fail. Failure means you will not become member of society, and worse.

* * *

THE letter had been written by the fat *babu*, evidently at the orders of others in the societies, and between the lines Menzies read many things, with an anger that increased with every picture that came to his mind.

First, it was obvious that, from the very beginning, the societies had known the jewels would not be the real ones. They had used the jewels as a bait to get him—no doubt feeling sure that he would scheme to get them for himself.

They wanted him, because the societies had been paid by a certain political society, which prates of "India for the Indians," paid to assassinate the king and queen, and so further the "cause." Since it was no easy task to kill the king and queen, Menzies' skill to get to them had been needed. Besides, the political society could make capital out of the killing being done by an Englishman—they could explain this to their dupes as showing that the English were with them and were against the Government.

It was all very simple, as he saw it. And he saw clearly. But did they really expect he would do it? He looked into the savage faces of the two waiting officers, and at the four guards. Yes, they expected him to do it—what was a death or two to such brutes—almost as little as it would be to the same number of Germans. And, if he failed, they were ready to do the ghastly thing themselves.

In some way Menzies kept his head. His part was to keep the natives believing that he was going to do the murder while he found some way to save the intended victims. He had ceased to be a criminal. He had become an Englishman. It was not so much that the lives of a man and woman were at stake; it was something greater, more important. Menzies didn't quite know what it was. If he had had time, and been asked, he might have tried to explain his feelings by the word patriotism. But he didn't have that time.

Perhaps twenty seconds had passed since he read the letter. The servant had lied at the foot of the stairs—Menzies felt sure of that; but had the guard spoken the truth about the number of people in the Throne Room? He heard voices in the room. The officer nearest handed him a revolver, which he took.

"I can do it," he whispered, feeling

inspired. "You all go—get to safety—while I kill them!"

The officer grinned and shook his head.

"We'll get away," he returned. "We made plans you know nothing about. All the men have their orders. You are no longer in command. You are to obey!"

"All right, I don't care." Menzies spoke easily, his rage only just under control. A dirty native speaking to him that way! He gripped the revolver and raised it slightly.

"There are only two shells in it—one for each," whispered the officer significantly, as if divining that Menzies was thinking of taking a chance and trying to shoot the six who now surrounded him.

"All right."

And then, to the white man's delight, the officer, who had given him the revolver, motioned to the four guards, and they hastened down the stairs. It seemed that they had played into his hands. Only two of them, and he had two shells in his revolver. He stepped back suddenly, aimed, and—only the click of the hammer answered the press of his finger. They had tricked him into showing his intentions.

"So!"

The villainous native sneered, then stiffened—voices were heard in the room again, closer than before. Some one was about to open the door. Were the royal couple really in the room? And, if so, were they about to walk into a death trap?

It was not remarkable that the conspirators had been undisturbed, because only servants and "necessary" people were allowed in the house. Among the necessary people were of course the guards. All this had been taken into account by Menzies when he made his elaborate preparations. And it was not three minutes since the letter had revealed to him that his brain had been used for a fouler end than mere theft. And now, what could he do? To shout for aid would be no good. If he raised his voice, some one would open the door—making targets for the false officers. And, besides, there was no one in the building to help, no one except the few faithful servants, whom the criminal guards had no doubt taken care of, who would come to the assistance of the king and queen if called for. No, Menzies' preparations had been too complete, too carefully laid. Unless they had already made their escape, there were only the false guards to hear the cries—for help or of agony.

Only seconds had passed since the voices had been heard in the room, but during those seconds Menzies had searched his fertile brain in vain for some way of saving the intended victims. The two false officers had drawn their revolvers, loaded with no dummy shells. Even if the grounds had suddenly filled with loyal troops, there would be no time for them to reach the head of the stairs. With an agony he had never believed possible to a human mind, Menzies waited dumbly for the door to open. If he made a move, a blow on the head from one of the revolvers would put him out of business—the natives would not even have to shoot him. And upon him, upon his retaining his senses and ability to act, depended the lives of the King and Queen of England.

He wondered many things during those terrible seconds, but most of all he wondered why the natives allowed him to live. They could have killed, or at least stunned him, without alarming the people in the room. What was their motive in letting him stand there, a possible agency against them, even if a very slight one? He was disguised as a Sikh, of course. Did they in some way mean to throw the blame on him? Ah, that was it. After the killing, with no witness left to tell the truth, they meant, if caught, to strip off his disguise as a proof that he had done the murders.

That in itself would be enough to save their lives—no jury would convict them with such evidence. They were even safe from being held as accessories—in a few seconds they could change themselves into ordinary natives and swear they tried to save the very people they killed—explaining that they were attracted to the scene by the cries. And false as the statement might look to a clear thinker, what juryman would see through it? The grounds deserted by the false guard, who could say the two men did not run in from the road? He remembered how the two false officers had kept in the background when he gave the note to the real Sikh—that officer had probably never seen them and would not have one chance in a hundred of identifying them. Or they might have another plan of escape—one of which Menzies did not dream.

From the moment he had spoken the weird passwords to the native smith in

Calcutta Menzies had been the simple catspaw of the societies and had done all their heavy thinking for them. Was ever a clever man so neatly tricked?

And now, helpless, all this understanding had come to him in the space of seconds. Breathless, he waited. What could he do except shout a fruitless warning? The handle of the door moved. Some one inside was about to turn it, and open the door.

The two natives grinned wickedly, their faces distorted with the lust to kill. His senses strained to the uttermost, Menzies hardly noticed that one of them was pointing a revolver at him. At that moment a sudden roar arose from the compound. The grounds were filling with troops. The substitution of the guard of criminals had been discovered. As if eager to discover what had caused the noise, some one abruptly opened the door.

What happened then was beyond thought and intention. Menzies acted, knowing nothing of what he did, except the impulse driving him to do it. In a flash of sight, through the opening door, he had seen the royal couple, among about half a dozen others. With a warning shout he flung himself at the native who was taking aim at the king, diverting his bullet. At the same instant the other native shot at Menzies—missing him by inches.

Only one assassin confronted the petrified and astonished group, for Menzies had managed to stun the other with his fist. This one, backing away slowly toward the stairs, took careful aim and fired—missing the king but hitting another man. Bewildered by unexpected failure and harried by the sound of men running up the stairs, the native ran forward—aiming and meaning to make sure of getting the king—as Menzies staggered to his feet.

The officers with the king had recovered from their astonishment and unpardonable losing of their heads, but it was the king himself who rushed bravely at the assassin. They were less than six feet apart when the native stopped, took steady aim and fired just as Menzies threw himself across the chest of the monarch, bearing him to the ground and receiving in his own back the bullet which otherwise would have ended the reign.

THE king himself was there when the doctor bared the white body.

"Why, he's a white man!"

"Yes, your Majesty, I don't understand it." The doctor removed the beard from the unconscious, dyed face. "Dressed and bearded to look like a Sikh, sir!"

"Will he recover?"

"Not a chance, sir—be dead in a very little while."

Suddenly the eyes, fast glazing, opened.

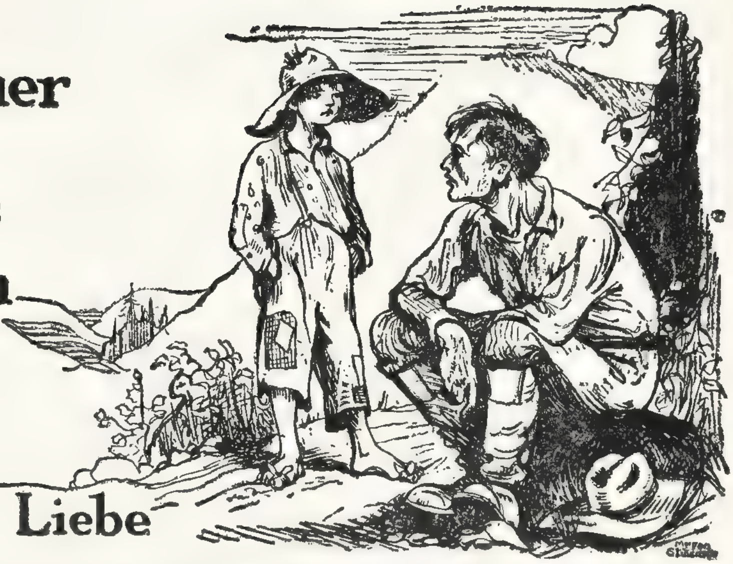
"Jewels," muttered Menzies.

"What is it—what does he mean?"

"I—have found—it—it's—the brightest jewel—of them all!" Menzies whispered.

And he passed, leaving them wondering what he meant.

Godfather *to* Satan's Kitchen



by Hapsburg Liebe

Author of "The Lavender Letter," "Howling Jim's Pa," etc.

IT WAS rather thickly populated for a mountain community, this broad valley that lies between the Big Bald and the bigger Ironhead, and it had been known for decades as "Hell's Kitchen" because of the small but bitter wars that had been waged within its rims. The teachers of the newly established Presbyterian mission school sought to call it Maplewood Valley, but the masculine half of the hill-folk laughed at them and hinted at softening of the brain. Then the teachers offered to compromise by calling it "Satan's Kitchen," and the people met them half-way. So Satan's Kitchen it became, and Satan's Kitchen it is yet.

The Buckmasters didn't live in the Satan's Kitchen valley. If they had, the picturesque original name of the place wouldn't have suited worth a cent; it would have been altogether too mild. Few in mountainous Eastern Tennessee but have heard the name Buckmaster without thinking at the same time of rifles and pistols, highway robberies, killings and hangmen's ropes. A thousand mothers, no doubt, have made bogy men of those Buckmasters and thereby frightened their unruly children into more or less abject submission. The Bear Creek Buckmasters bucked the United States Government, and they had to lose. They went down with their boots on, true to their false principles; all the same, they lost.

Save one, that is, and this one was Lon. Lon's mother had given him some of the gentler traits. She was a lowland woman who married a dashing Buckmaster, to regret it soon afterward. The angel in Lon and the devil in Lon were forever disputing the possession of him; sometimes the devil lost but more frequently the devil won. Had it not been for Little Billy Bly and 'Liz'beth Elderidge——

They called him "Bear Creek" in the Army of the Philippines, just as they had done at home. The sins of a man's fathers are apt to find him out, you know, even on the other side of the world. He went to the Army to be rid of his environment; he wanted to be better than he had any chance to be in the Bear Creek country. But, as I have just indicated, his family history trailed along on his heels, and the angel in him went down in utter defeat for three years. His comrades were exceedingly friendly toward him because they were afraid of him, and this made him but more bitter. All through his term of enlistment he was a lone man, a man apart, with the devil in him whooping challenges to high heaven from the very upper ramparts of his soul. He reached home to find people wondering—and not wholly in secret—why there was a Bear Creek Buckmaster still unhung, and he became a greater outcast than ever.

Then he changed his name and went

to work with a logging outfit on Little Pigeon River. A few months and they discovered his identity; he was suspected of having held up and robbed a pay-roll messenger, and he was discharged forthwith. He went to other camps with exactly the same result—he was a Bear Creek Buckmaster, and he could not escape for long the sins of his fathers. That he was the best logger and the hardest and cleanest fighter in any of those camps availed him nothing. He had to go when they found him out. Always, always, the moths ate the ermine.

THE frosts of Autumn paint the mountains with their widest brushes in October; the great hills then suggest the coming to life of some overzealous Brobdingnagian landscape artist's canvas, so vivid are they in their riots of colors. It was in October, that melancholy but beautiful month, that Lon Buckmaster went to the logging-camp on Tumbling Fork to ask for a job. He had tried all the other outfits. This was his last chance and he was desperate about it. If they wouldn't have him here—well, he'd laid his plans ahead of that.

Buckmaster arrived at the Tumbling Fork headquarters on a sunny Sunday afternoon. The rollicking timberjacks had just left off their horseplay in the clearing to gather in the company's commissary, where the superintendent himself was dispensing, for a consideration of course, glasses of clear new corn whisky that had never been near to the disgrace of a revenue stamp—the law's long arm had not yet felt its way very strongly into the wilderness about Tumbling Fork, which was on the other side of Ironhead Mountain from Satan's Kitchen.

A silence fell over the roysterers as the outcast stepped into the commissary doorway. Every eye was hard upon that tall and lean, hickory-muscled young man in the steel-calked boots, clay-colored corduroys, blue shirt and broad felt hat of the logging country.

Then somebody whispered uneasily—"It's Bear Creek Buckmaster!"

Bear Creek Buckmaster broke the silence which followed that whisper. He hadn't used his tongue much while in the Army and he still spoke largely in his native dialect. But he never drawled anything now.

"Listen here, super," he said. "Listen to me. I want to talk to ye. As ye already know, mebbe, I'm Lon Buckmaster. But I ain't never done nobody no harm like they say I have. I want a job here. I'll do ye lots o' work. I'll do ye more work 'an anybody else in this outfit. I only want a chanst to show ye. Super, will ye gi' me a chanst?"

It was a long speech for him to make. The superintendent of the Tumbling Fork logging operations looked toward a sawed-off shotgun that lay on a shelf behind the counter and swallowed a glass of whisky.

"I couldn't do it, Lon," he answered. "I'd lose my own job ef I did. You know how it is. But don't blame me! I'm sorry fo' ye, Lon, honest. It's a shame, shore. But I cain't help it any."

A leaden, still minute went by. The tickings of the little nickel-plated commissary clock sounded to Buckmaster like the hammering of a boilermaker. Buckmaster went ashen under his sunburn. The devil in him twisted his lips in a curious, careless smile. His last chance was gone.

"The only thing left," he said measuredly, deliberately, "is fo' me to live up to the repitation all o' you good peple has saddled on me, whether I wanted it or not. All o' you good, whisky-guzzlin', lyin', swearin', gamblin', back-stabbin' folks says I'm a robber and a killer and a thief and a desperaydo. I ain't a goin' to disapp'int ye no longer. Look out, super—duck, there—I was borned into this world with a gun in both hands and a Cain-mark on my forrad—duck there, super!"

There was a *bang* and a *bang* and a *bang-bang!* The tinkle of broken glass, the acrid scent of powder smoke. Before the echo of the last shot had died away Bear Creek Buckmaster stood alone in the commissary. Then he laughed to himself, reloaded the four empty chambers of his new Colt, took up a jug of the superintendent's stampless new whisky, dashed it through a show-case and went out. As he walked by the office he shot a lamp off the desk. As he walked by the boarding-house he sent two bullets crashing through four corner windows of that big, rough building. He didn't see the hair of a man's head as he passed.

A mile down Tumbling Fork Lon Buckmaster dropped to a stone and began to draw bitter honey, as it were, from one of the most poisonous weeds in the garden of life—self-pity. It was the first time in his twenty-four years that he had done it. All his wrongs stalked in review before his mind's eye, among them even wrongs of his childhood.

They wouldn't let him be upright, a man as other men and free to pursue human happiness according to the dictates of his heart and his conscience. He was forced into outlawry, and he was going to make good! He hoped very much that he could travel his red road without having to kill anybody. But if he had to kill, kill he would. He bent his head to his hands, gazed absently toward the toes of his steel-calked logging-boots and thought once more of the only real friend he had had in all the world—the little lowland woman.

It made him sob in spite of himself and he cursed roundly that which to him seemed unmanly weakness.

A shrill, youthful voice interrupted his brooding.

"Mister, what's the matter?"

It came with the suddenness of a thunderburst, but it scarcely startled the outcast. He turned his head slowly and saw a ten-year-old boy standing there beside him. The boy had on clothing that had been patched so much that it resembled an old-fashioned crazy-quilt. Half his thatch of flaxen hair rose grass-like out of a big hole in the crown of his battered straw hat. Both of his big toes were bound up in dirty rags. He was sunburnt brown and as freckled as a turkey's egg.

"What's it to you, ye rat?" snapped the devil in Lon Buckmaster.

"It ain't nothin' to me," the rat answered soberly. "Only I was sort o' sorry fo' ye. I've had a heap o' trouble myself, mister."

Buckmaster grinned sourly.

"Why don't ye be happy whilst ye can, son? Ye don't know the fust beginnin' o' trouble."

"I don't!" The boy stiffened. He had some spirit, that boy. "Well, how's this. My mammy, she died two year ago. It might' nigh killed me and pap. Pap, he never got over it; nor me, neither. Last week pap died too. He's free. But me, I got to go on and on wi' the load. We didn't have no kin and we didn't have no money. Afore pap went out he told me this here: 'Son,' he says, 'ef ye can git to the mission school in Satan's Kitchen,' he says, 'fo' God's sake go. Them Presbyterians,' he says, 'they'll take good keer o' ye. They thinks more o' their own kind o' folks,' says pap, 'than they thinks o' them coffee-colored heathens in other countries.'

"And so I'm on my way to Satan's Kitchen. I been kicked and I've starved. It's been a hundred mile and I been lost a hundred times; I'm lost now. And I'm still starved. The only thing I've had to eat fo' two days was a moldy dodger o' cawnbread what I stole from a pore old mangey hound dawg. I was awful sorry fo' that hound dawg and I handed him half o' the dodger back. Now, mister, what ha' ye got to say? Ef that ain't trouble, what is? Can ye tell me?"

Buckmaster reached for the lad's hand and he got it. He gripped it painfully hard. But the lad didn't even wince.

"Shore, son, ye've had trouble. What's ye name?"

"Little Billy Bly."

"Purty name, son. Well, listen here. I know the way to Satan's Kitchen and I'll take ye over. It's about a half a day's walk. But fust we must have somethin' to eat. Light in and foller this here creek a mile up and ye'll come to a logging'-camp; ax fo' the sup'rintendent and tell him I said to gi' ye all the cawned beef and crackers ye can carry and charge the same to my account—Bear Creek Lon Buckmaster's account. Eh?"

If the name had any effect upon Little Billy Bly he showed no sign of it, a thing for which Buckmaster was grateful.

"Done gone," said the boy over his shoulder.

He came back shortly and he had in the hooks of his two arms all the corned beef and crackers he could conveniently carry. The two made a meal and then set out across Ironhead Mountain. They spent the night in an empty tobacco-barn and finished the last leg of the journey about the middle of the following morning.

THE mission "settlement" was in the lower end of the valley on a crystal-clear creek. The few buildings were of logs and they had not been erected without an eye to the picturesque and pretty, especially in the matters of roofs and porches. There were trees standing all around and the paths were lying full of newly fallen leaves. Little Billy Bly's brown feet ran joyously through those leaves; the feel of them was soothing to his stubbed and sore big toes.

It was the first time the white sheep of the Bear Creek Buckmasters had been so near to the mission settlement; hitherto he had viewed it only from a distance; yet he went straight to the schoolhouse. Backwardness was not one of his faults. He opened the door and walked in, Little Billy following eagerly. His heavy boots clattered noisily on the rough floor and he became at once the object of scores of expectant eyes, among them those of the quiet-mannered, middle-aged woman who had charge of that room.

When he and the barefoot boy stood before the desk, Buckmaster took off his hat.

"Good mornin'," he smiled. "This here—" jerking his chin toward the lad at his side—"is a orphant named Little Billy Bly, who ain't got no pap nor no mother. His pap wanted him to come here. He's plum' up to the mustard, Little Billy is; he's all wool and a yard wide; I'll gyarantee that. Can ye take him in and feed and take keer of him and edgicate him?"

"We'll do everything we're able to do for him," Mrs. Hardin said pleasantly. She rose. "My husband is the principal; he teaches the older pupils in the next room. Perhaps I'd better take the boy to him——"

"Shore," said Buckmaster. "Go along with her, Billy, son. She's all right. They're all all right. Do whatever they say fo' ye to do, ef it's to set the house afire, and be a reel good boy."

"You stay, too," begged Little Billy.

He had grown fond of Buckmaster.

"Oh, no, son!" Buckmaster laughed. He was delighted; here, at last, was a human being who liked him genuinely and trusted him. "Go on, little pardner. Now rickollect: ye must be a awful good boy."

"Will ye come to see me sometimes?"

"Yeuh. As shore as green apples. Run along with her, son."

Billy Bly followed Mrs. Hardin out of that room and into the next. While he waited Buckmaster turned his gaze interestedly down the rows of poorly clad boys and girls of the primary classes, all of whom eyed him solemnly and more or less admiringly now. They ran, mostly, from six years of age up to ten—and then Lon Buckmaster saw that among them there was a full-grown young woman. And she was pretty. She was prettier, it seemed to him, than anybody else he had ever seen, though she wore the cheapest of calico and the coarsest of shoes and stockings. He always remembered that; at first sight she seemed quite the comeliest girl he had ever seen—and he had been to the antipodes and back as a soldier.

Acting upon an impulse, he walked down the aisle and stopped beside her. He knew that she was there, in that room with all those small children, to satisfy her desire for education, and he admired her immensely for it. It was humiliating to her; he knew that, too.

"I meet folks sometimes that I never do fo'git," he half whispered, his manner sober and honest. "I ain't never a goin' to fo'git you fo' this what ye're a doin' now. My hat is shore off fo' you. Ef ye don't mind, what might be yore name, miss?"

The girl almost smiled her appreciation of him.

"Pap calls me Liz," she told him in her soft and musical hill talk, "and mother calls me Lizzie; but my real name is 'Liz'beth. 'Liz'beth Elderidge. I—I'm here to l'arn how to read and write. Mother said I ought to know that, ef I don't never know nothin' else. Might—might I ax what yore name is?"

His eyes hardened a little. He hated to tell her, for it was plain to him that she did not look down upon him now. But finally he did tell her.

"My name's Alonzo, but they calls me Lon. I'm a Bear Creek Buckmaster, 'Liz'beth. I reckon, mebbe, ye've heerd tell o' them Bear Creek Buckmasters; hain't ye?"

She nodded. She seemed disappointed somewhat, he noted. He bent over her with this in a low voice:

"I've done the best I could wi' what I had, 'Liz'beth. It's allus been a hard, up-hill road fo' me. Mebbe ye cain't unnerstand. But I'd give six fingers, one ear and a whole foot to know ye believe me."

He straightened and looked around. Professor Hardin and Little Billy Bly stood at the desk. Hardin was preacher, teacher, and man all over. He shook hands with Buckmaster and proceeded forthwith to tell him a good deal about the work and the hopes and something of the needs of the Satan's Kitchen mission.

Then the Bear Creek Buckmaster left the settlement. He went deep into the hazy October woods, sat himself down on a stone and spent a solid hour in hard thinking, after which he rose and headed for the Little Pigeon River logging country, miles and miles away.

A WEEK afterward two of the Little Pigeon River logging country's pay-roll messengers were held up and robbed by a hickory-strong young man with a steely voice, a big blue bandanna over his face and a big blue Colt in his hand. And a week after that Professor Hardin of the Satan's Kitchen mission awoke to find two thousand dollars in cash lying on his cheap pine dresser, which stood by an open window of his bedroom. A scrawled and unsigned note stated that the money was to be used for the school and the chapel and for Little Billy Bly in particular. The bare hint of a threat, too, was in that scrawled and unsigned note. The money was to be well spent and not a single whisper as to where it had come from was to be whispered.

The Bear Creek Buckmaster was living up to the reputation that his wild fathers had made for him and the "good, whisky-guzzling, lying, swearing, gambling, back-stabbing people" had saddled tightly upon him—whether he wanted it or not. A reward was promptly posted for his capture and officers began to scour the mountains for him. His bandanna mask had been a bandanna wasted; they had known, of course, that it was he.

But the officers didn't find Lon Buckmaster; not then, anyway. He knew the big hills and their hidden fastnesses, and the officers did not.

A month later, when the chase had been for the time given up, Lon Buckmaster drifted into the Satan's Kitchen neighborhood again. He told himself that he was merely keeping his promise to visit Little Billy Bly; but deep down in the heart of him he knew that he wanted to see—just to see—the girl named 'Liz'beth Elderidge as much as he wanted to visit Little Billy Bly. Not for many hours at a stretch had 'Liz'beth Elderidge been entirely out of his mind. The memory of her was distinctly haunting.

On the afternoon of his arrival in the broad valley it was snowing, and because of that he lost his bearings and almost walked into the creek a quarter of a mile above the mission settlement. A well-beaten path ran beside the stream. While he stood there in the woods trail and tried to decide which way he should turn, a bundled-up little figure emerged from the white smother, halted close before him and laughed gleefully.

"Bear Creek!" cried the bundled-up little figure.

"Ef it ain't Billy Bly!" exclaimed Lon Buckmaster. "This here is shore some luck. Shake hands wi' me, son. I'm plum' tickled to see ye' a-lookin' so good. But where are ye a-goin' to in all o' this snow?"

They shook hands in a thoroughly grown-up fashion.

"Home," grinned Little Billy. "I live wi' Tom Elderidge's fambly now, 'Liz'beth's folks. Her pap, he took me in. They're awful good to me, mostly; the 'lasses jar ain't never shet to me there. 'Fessor Hardin, he says I'm awful smart in my books, Bear Creek. I can spell cat and dawg and boy a'ready. C-a-t, cat; d-o-g, dawg; b-o-y, boy. See?"

"Ye can, fo' sartain!" laughed Buckmaster. "I'm glad o' that, son. It was nice in them Elderidges to take ye in, wasn't it?"

"Yeuh," gravely. "But ye mustn't never say 'sartain,' Bear Creek. It ain't proper, 'Fessor Hardin says. Ye must say 'certain,' Bear Creek. They didn't have much room at the mission; but the 'fessor, he said I could ha' stayed there ef I hadn't ha' faound no place else. The Elderidges is crowded too, but I like it. I ain't never lonesome there. Ye see, Bear Creek, they've got lots o' young uns and hound dawgs. Me and 'Liz'beth, we've got us two little beds in the cabin loft and we studies our books up there at night—when it ain't too cold and when Tom can afford to let us burn a lamp. Say, 'Liz'beth is shore some gyurl! Says her pra'rs every night. 'Now I lay me down to sleep; pray the Lord my soul to keep. 'F I sh'd die afore I wake, pray the Lord my soul to take. Bless pap and mother and the young uns and Little Billy and me and everybody else; and help Lon Buckmaster out o' the hole he's in, fo' Christ's sake—Aymen!' Jest reels it off thataway, Bear Creek."

"Does she say that in her pra'rs, little pardner?" soberly inquired the white sheep of the Bear Creek Buckmasters. "Are ye plum' sartain?"

"Certain, not 'sartain,'" Billy Bly corrected gently. "Yeuh, I'm plum' sartain—I mean certain! Hope to die right here in my tracks ef she don't. Say, they've got a new organ in the mission chapel and every dang soul—'dang soul,' that's what Tom said—every dang soul in the valley goes to meetin' on Sundays to hear it. Mis' Hardin' and the 'fessor, they sings to it. See these here new clo'es I've got on? The 'fessor, he bought 'em fo' me. Hain't they purty? Tom said they was as purty as a speckled pup wi' a ring around its neck. Satan's Kitchen is on a boom, Tom says. Tom's a-gittin' 'ligious. He tried to have fambly pra'rs last night—he'd went down to the mission and borried a Bible—but the young uns and the dang hound dawgs made so much fuss he couldn't do it; so he jumps up and breshes the dirt off o' his knees and says to his wife, he says:

" '——, Mary,' he says, 'what's the use? Blow out the lamp,' he says, 'and save a little ile!'

"And so me and 'Liz'beth had to go to our beds in the loft without any light, and 'Liz'beth snubbed some over it—I reckon it must ha' been her pap's bossy talk."

"Where's 'Liz'beth now, son?"

"She's took to studyin' a hour after school's out, every day," Little Billy answered. "She'll be along purty soon. I'm a-hurryin' home, 'cause Tom promised to make me and the young uns a sled to ride down-hill on in the snow. It ain't so awful cold; is it, Bear Creek?"

"Not much cold," Buckmaster answered thoughtfully. "Mebbe ye'd better run on and try out the sled, son. Eh?"

There was a reason for this suggestion. He wanted to see 'Liz'beth alone. He knew he had no right, it was true, but that did not keep him from wishing to see 'Liz'beth alone. The boy left him and he stood there in the snowy mountain path and waited. And while he waited his mind was busy—Little Billy had on new clothing and the mission chapel had a new organ; Satan's Kitchen was on a boom! Professor Hardin, no doubt, had spent well the two thousand dollars that he, Buckmaster, had taken from the two pay-roll messengers on Little Pigeon. It was gratifying.

After the better part of an hour 'Liz'beth came. She wore an imitation Paisley shawl over a dress of blue calico and the shawl was white with sparkling snowflakes; her eyes were bright and her cheeks were pink from the snappy air and perfect health. She knew him the moment she saw him, the ghostly smother notwithstanding, and she walked straight up to him, unafraid, and put out her hand.

He took it very reverently.

"I'm glad to see ye oncet more, 'Liz'beth," he told her.

"I'm glad to see you, too, Lon," she said.

"Ye don't think I'm as low-down mean as everybody says I am?"

"No—I don't!" with a tiny dash of girlish vehemence.

Buckmaster smiled.

"One o' the God-blessedest things they is about wimmen," he declared, "is that they're might' nigh allus strong fo' the under dawg. I thank ye fo' that, 'Liz'beth, shore. Ef ye could only unnerstand! They ain't nothin' on earth as good as to have friends. Everything else is pore truck without friends. And I know jest what it is to be without 'em, 'Liz'beth."

"I think I do unnerstand," said Tom Elderidge's daughter. "I've heerd a lot about ye, Lon, and I've sifted it. I—I've axed a lot about ye, lately. Even pap, he says ye ain't half as bad as folks tells. Ye tried to be straight and they wouldn't have it that way. They put them pay-roll rob'ries at yore door 'cause ye happened to be a Bear Creek Buckmaster, Lon, and fo' no other reason."

"The fust ones—anyhow," muttered Buckmaster.

He was a little muddled.

"Yes," nodded 'Liz'beth. She didn't notice that he was a little muddled. "I've been a-thinkin', Lon. Mebbe somebody has been a-trailin' ye around, a-robbin' pay messengers and a-usin' you fo' a scapegoat!"

"Mebbe," Buckmaster replied absently. He was thinking of something else. "Listen, 'Liz'beth," he blurted, "I heerd about—about you a-rememberin' me thataway, in the loft at night. I won't never fo'git that, and ef I'm ever pulled out o' the hole I'm in I'm a-goin' to ax ye to marry me the next minute!"

'Liz'beth blushed, but she didn't turn her eyes from his strong, sober face.

"You ain't never seed me but twicet, Lon Buckmaster. You don't like me that much."

"I don't?" The outlaw smiled. "Never seed ye but twicet, eh? Why, bless yore heart, 'Liz'beth, oncet was enough!"

Then his countenance became serious,

even troubled. He began to back off into the snowy laurels. In another minute he had disappeared and 'Liz'beth Elderidge stood alone there in the white-carpeted trail. His voice came from somewhere out in the forest:

"I didn't have a right to tell ye that, 'Liz'beth. I hope ye'll fo'give me, ef ye can."

"They's nothin' to fo'give, Lon," she called back. Once had been enough for her, too. "I believe in ye, Lon. Mebbe I oughtn't to, but I do, jest the same. And ef ever ye ax me—that what ye said ye'd ax me—I'll tell ye, 'yes' ef I die fo' it!"

She wondered, as she went on, whether he had heard.

He had heard, and he hadn't known what to say. But one thing he did know; the skies were rosy above the dark cloud. And he was grateful for that.

As he threaded his way through the white-draped woods an idea of 'Liz'beth's recurred to him—"Mebbe somebody has been usin' you fo' a scapegoat."

"Ef that's really the way of it," he said to himself, "and I ketch that man, it'll go hard with him. But I reckon it ain't like that."

He had figured as the star actor in two hold-ups, of course; but he hadn't even known of the others, those that had started him upon his career of outlawry, until he he had been accused of them.

A WEEK passed. The snow melted and more snow came; once again the great hills were wrapped in Winter's cold, pale shroud. Bear Creek Buckmaster spent the most of those bleak and desolate days in a floorless and windswept tobacco-barn; he ate whatever he could find to eat and always he was trying to think of a possible way out of the hole he was in. Had it not been for 'Liz'beth he would have gone to some new country of the West or Northwest to begin life all over. He couldn't leave his mountains; not now, after her telling him that she would marry him when he asked her. He decided that he would hold up no more pay-roll messengers.

The snow melted again, rain came and was followed by sleet and the mercury went down like a rocket all over eastern Tennessee. Buckmaster's temporary quarters became decidedly uncomfortable and he started for a deserted old cabin on the eastern slope of the Big Bald, a cabin that had a fireplace; nobody would live there because it was so far from the beaten paths and because a man, a moonshiner, had been killed in the doorway.

By noon on a Saturday he had reached the crest of the Big Bald's highest eastern spur, and he halted to look over the broad stretch of rugged country lying below him. Suddenly his keen eyes made out the figure of a man on horseback on a winding trail a mile down the slope. The horse was a light gray, by which Buckmaster concluded—correctly—that the rider was a cattle-buyer from the lowland, an elderly fellow named Rubens. Then his eyes caught something else and he uttered a little exclamation that was half oath.

Down there a small and wiry man in loggers' clothing was sneaking afoot toward a shallow ravine which Rubens would doubtless ride into within five minutes, and his motive for thus crossing the cattle-buyer's trail was plainly no honest one.

Buckmaster drew his revolver and stole rapidly down the mountainside toward the wiry little man. But he reached the ravine too late. The hold-up was over; a shot had been fired and Rubens was galloping wildly for the lowland when Buckmaster arrived. The robber stood half hidden in the scrub beside the bridle-path. He was staring at a rather fat wallet that he held in one hand. His revolver he had thrust into one of the pockets of his clay-colored corduroy coat; Buckmaster could see four inches of the barrel sticking out.

Buckmaster crept closer to the robber, straightened and called—

"Drap it!"

The highwayman let the wallet fall to the frozen leaves, raised both arms and turned a pale, thin face to him who was the white sheep of his people.

"I'll be blamed fo' this," said the Buckmaster with a sidewise mental glance at his resolve to figure in no more hold-ups. "And so I'm a goin' to be paid fo' it. Keep ye paws as nigh to the blue sky as ye can and walk off down the trail, pardner. Hear me? Walk! I'm a-takin' no chances now."

The little man kept his hands up and walked. His footsteps were unsteady, like those of one who is more or less intoxicated. The other paid no especial attention to this at the time of it, but he had cause to remember it before another day had come.

Lon Buckmaster slipped to the mission settlement in Satan's Kitchen that night. He soundlessly lifted the lower sash of Professor Hardin's bedroom window and left eleven hundred dollars in bank-notes, together with a scrawled and unsigned message, on the cheap pine dresser; then he hied himself away through the bitter cold and to the old cabin on the eastern slope of the Big Bald.

It was past midnight when he reached the mildewed log-house, which stood in a deep gash of a cove filled with hemlock trees. He strode up to the weatherbeaten door—and found it fastened on the inside.

Buckmaster had made no noise. It had long been a habit of his to make no noise. He went to the one paneless window and peered cautiously through. The embers of a fire, he saw, glowed softly in the blackened stone fireplace. On the molded stone hearth lay the motionless figure of a man.

It was at least five miles to another shelter that was as good as that old cabin and Buckmaster was weary; besides, the wind that was sweeping the hills was like the edge of a razor. Then, too, Buckmaster was curious to find out who it was that had beaten him to that snug little haven of refuge. He slipped the blade of his knife carefully between the door and its casing, as carefully lifted the latch, eased the door open and tiptoed in. With his revolver at a ready he stooped over the still form on the hearth.

"The fire's purty near out, pardner," he said, "and ye're apt to freeze. Ye ought to made it o' bigger stuff."

There was no reply. Neither was there the slightest movement on the part of the unknown. In the soft glow of the dying coals Buckmaster spied an armload of brushwood lying close by; he snatched up a handful and threw it into the fireplace. A flicker of flame rose, then another and another, and there was light. Buckmaster stooped over the inert figure again.

It was the little man who had held up Rubens, the cattle-buyer. Lon Buckmaster bit down on an exclamation of surprize and bent lower.

As the flames in the fireplace grew brighter he saw that the face of the stranger was almost waxen-white. The little fellow was in a bad way, surely. Buckmaster shook him and his eyes snapped open feverishly; in them there was the fear that makes rank cowards of men.

"Who're you?" he half gasped.

He struggled to sit up and failed.

"Me? I'm Lon Buckmaster o' Bear Creek. Who're you, pardner, and what's the matter wi' ye?"

"Buckmaster!" The fear in the smaller man's eyes became even greater. "Buckmaster!"

"Yeuh. Bear Creek Lon Buckmaster. What's the matter wi' ye?"

The unknown turned slightly and with evident pain. His blue shirt was already unbuttoned; he drew it open over his thin chest and revealed a purple-edged bullet-hole not far from his heart.

"Through and through," he mumbled. "Rubens—he got me."

"Rubens! I thought it was you shot at Rubens."

"No. It was him. He shot as he galloped off. I'm a-goin'—to cash in, Buckmaster. Ef I could only square it wi' you, mebbe I—mebbe I could git some mercy fo' the other things I've done."

"I see," Lon Buckmaster growled. Once more, certain of 'Liz'beth Elderidge's words came back to him. After all, she had been right about it, and this was the man who had used him as a scapegoat. "But how," he demanded, anger burning hotly within him, "do ye think ye're a goin' to square it wi' me?"

"I'm a-dyin', Buckmaster."

"Shore. Anybody could see that."

"And hate to go out thisaway."

"Yeuh. Most o' people would. Ye shore ain't got no golden harp a-comin' to you, pardner."

"No. I reckon—my golden harp'll be a pitchfork, mebbe. I——"

"Wi' sharp barbs on it," Buckmaster cut in mercilessly. "And ye'll have horns on ye head and a tail which has a spike on the end. Also, yore tongue will be split like a snake's."

The little man moaned.

"It ain't no time," he insisted, "fo' jokin', Buckmaster."

"No," Buckmaster agreed quickly, "it ain't."

A moment of silence. Then:

"I've got might' nigh all o' the money I took in yore name, Buckmaster," came the weakening voice of the unknown. "Ef ye'll fo'give me—ye can have every cent of it."

The Bear Creek Buckmaster thought again of the Satan's Kitchen mission. It could use that money; it needed that money. Besides, when it came down to a hard pinch he could never refuse any dying man a favor. The angel in him had struggled to the ascendency, having once more vanquished the devil.

"I'll do it," he said, and he reached for the other's clammy hand. "It's all right. I fo'give ye, pardner. It's all right."

"Much obleeged to ye. Look under this here hearth—they's a heap. Still, I hate to go. Could ye pray fo' me a little, do ye reckon?"

"Pray! Me?" Buckmaster slowly shook his head. "I ain't never prayed none. Leastwise, not sence I was a bitsy kid. Mebbe it wouldn't do no good, nohow, me a-prayin' fo' you. Mebbe ye'd better pray fo' ye'self, pardner. I sp'ect it'd go a lot higher."

"Mebbe it would. Tell me what to say, Buckmaster. You know the—the sarcumstances."

The white sheep had softened all through, He had forgotten entirely his wrongs at the hands of that unknown man; he was deeply sorry for him now. As for prayers, there was but one that he knew and that was the one that 'Liz'beth Elderidge had been saying, with additions, at bedtime.

"All right," he agreed, and it was with difficulty that he kept his voice steady. "Say after me, pardner—

"Now I lay me down to sleep."

"Now I lay me—d-down to sleep."

"Pray the Lord——"

They went through with it very solemnly. The little fellow interrupted himself almost on the last syllable of his "Aymen."

"Buckmaster!" he cried, his sick eyes shining.

"Yeuh?" gently.

"Why didn't we think of it afore? Take me to witnesses and I'll clear ye!"

The Bear Creeker's strong face showed interest immediately. Why, indeed, hadn't they thought of it before? He didn't know why, but they hadn't. But that wouldn't clear him of everything. Still, it would help; it would show people that their conclusions had been wrong in the beginning.

He shook his head.

"It's awful cold, pardner. You couldn't never stand it. The clostest witnesses would be at the Satan's Kitchen mission."

"But I can stand it! Buckmaster, please help me to do—this one good thing afore I go. The's blankets—two blankets—over there in a cawner. Wrap 'em around me. I'm not heavy; ye could tote me easy. Ef I die without clearin' ye, Buckmaster—I won't die right. I've lived a low-down life, but I want to die right!"

Buckmaster lifted a stone from the hearth, took out a canvas bag nearly full of money and thrust it inside his blue shirt. A few minutes later he strode into the cold and dark and wind-swept mountain wilderness with a gray bundle in his arms.

* * *

HE DOESN'T remember a great deal of the journey now, though the years have been few since that night. It was a sort of nightmare to him. Twice he fell—he has hardly forgotten that—and each time he saved the limp form in the gray bundle from further injury. And he hoped that life and consciousness would stay with the little man until they reached Professor Hardin's home at the mission.

About the middle of that bright and sparkling Sunday morning Buckmaster half dragged himself and his burden to the top of a low spur that almost overhung the settlement and halted there, panting for breath. He was weak now; his wonderful strength was nearly spent; the average man never could have done what he had already done in the six hours just gone. His tired eyes roamed over the icicle-eaved houses of the mission, finally coming to rest on the chapel, the front of which was surmounted by a weather-worn wooden cross.

Under that cross by the doorstep were two men in officer-blue, and with them was Rubens, the lowland cattle-buyer. Buckmaster's inborn fear of the law gripped him now harder than ever. If he went on down there he would be arrested.

"Pardner!" he muttered. "Pardner!"

A muffled voice answered from the gray bundle. The highwayman was still alive.

"How do ye feel, pardner?"

" 'Bout the same. I—I'm awful cold, Buckmaster."

"The's two officers down at the mission, pardner. I see 'em."

"Go on," urged the muffled voice. "I'll clear ye."

Of a part of it! But the other part? Buckmaster shut his teeth tightly. The other part would send him to prison for no less than twenty years.

He would put the wounded man down there, call to the officers and ask them to come and get him, and make good his escape. The money he would take with him; the mission needed it and the mission should have it. Just when he was about to act on this plan, Tom Elderidge and his wife, 'Liz'beth and Little Billy Bly and six Elderidge children, followed by four hounds, came filing singly up the path that led from the creek trail to the chapel. Buckmaster watched 'Liz'beth closely; she was in coarse shoes and stockings, blue calico and the imitation Paisley shawl. He could see her features plainly, and to him she seemed sad. Then the chapel's new organ made itself heard, and a song in many willing voices burst like a benediction on the crisp mountain air:

> "There were ninety and nine that safely lay
>   In the shelter of the fold,
> But one went out on the hills——"

Bear Creek Lon Buckmaster, outlaw, found himself suddenly living over days of his childhood. The little lowland woman, his mother, she had sung that old, old song. The piteous, tragic irony of it was altogether lost on him, the white sheep—the little lowland woman had sung that song. No more was he his own master. Dazedly, like a man in a trance, he gathered the gray bundle closer against his breast and staggered with it down to the chapel's door, where he crumpled, unconscious, from exhaustion.

"Look to him," he muttered as he sank to the steps. "Mebbe he'll live——"

WHEN Buckmaster came around he was snug and warm and comfortable. He opened his eyes to see a piece of furniture that was familiar to him; it was a cheap pine dresser which stood beside a half-open window. He was in Professor Hardin's bed and the professor himself stood over him.

"Good mornin' to ye, pe'fessor!" he said.

"Only it's afternoon," Hardin smiled. "Feel all right now?"

"Keen as a mink. How's the bitsy robber?"

"Dead," Hardin said gravely. "It's a wonder he lived so long. But he saved you, Buckmaster. He swore before us all that he held up even those men that you held up! The officers got all the money. You're all right now."

Buckmaster's eyes narrowed. He was trying to think and it was a job.

"But that money I brung to you——"

"I kept it. I put it in with the 'bitsy' robber's money without the officers' being any the wiser. You see, I figured that you'd be caught, and I was holding that money as evidence in your favor; I was afraid to send it back to its owners, not knowing what you'd do if I did. If you were sent to prison I meant to circulate a petition among the Presbyterians of this State, to be sent ultimately to the governor, asking him to pardon you. It would have worked, too, Buckmaster, so long as you had no blood on your hands."

Buckmaster was silent for two minutes. So stolen funds hadn't bought the new organ, hadn't clothed Little Billy Bly.

"The bitsy robber, he swore a lie on his deathbed to come clean wi' me, to save me. That was fine of him, pe'fessor, shore. After all, the's been somethin' in my life wo'th livin' to have. But the future——"

"It will be just what you make it, Buckmaster. You've cleared your part of your name—you and the 'bitsy' robber—and the people are going to give you a chance now. You may be certain of that."

There was a half timid rap at the door and Hardin answered it. Little Billy Bly and 'Liz'beth Elderidge walked in, and 'Liz'beth carried a bowl of hot broth in her hands. Hardin bowed himself out.

"Howdy," said Buckmaster, smiling.

"Howdy," said 'Liz'beth, also smiling.

"Howdy," said Little Billy, and he smiled.

"Mis' Hardin," 'Liz'beth began, "she thought ye ought to have somethin' light to eat. We fixed it fo' ye and I've brung it."

She put the steaming bowl on a near-by table and went to the bedside. Little Billy Bly went to the bedside too, and they looked down upon the Bear Creek Buckmaster with an air of something like ownership. Suddenly 'Liz'beth blushed.

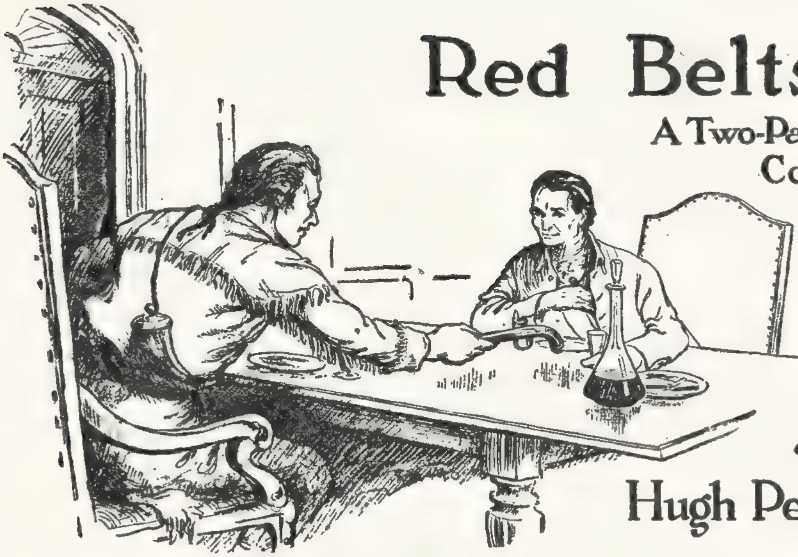
"Lon," she murmured, "ye're out o' the hole at last."

"I am. Will ye marry me, 'Liz'beth?"

"I will. And thank God fo' ye all o' the days He lets me live. Little Billy here, Lon; what about Little Billy? I love him to death, Lon!"

"He's ourn," Buckmaster declared. "Ourn, 'Liz'beth. Eh, Billy-boy?"

"Yeuh," gladly agreed Little Billy Bly.



Red Belts

A Two-Part Story Conclusion

by

Hugh Pendexter

Author of "When Kentucky Starved," "Carson of Taos," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

WHEN in 1784 North Carolina undertook to pay her national debt, she employed the simple means of handing over to the Government her land beyond the Alleghanies, later developed into the State of Tennessee, but then populated mostly by Indians, excepting Jonesboro, with its court-house and sixty-odd cabins, and the straggling settlements on the Holston and Nolichucky Rivers.

One July morning of that year Kirk Jackson wandered into Jonesboro in search of a girl, Elsie Tonpit, with whom he had fallen in love at Charlotte the year before. At the tavern Kirk found only trouble. Lon Hester, who had already spent some hours at the bar, disapproved of the stranger and told him so. A fight followed and Hester was badly beaten; but his cronies, especially Polcher, the wiley landlord, decided to take a hand.

"Drop that pistol, Polcher!" called a voice at the window.

Polcher obeyed, for the word of John Sevier, "Chucky Jack," was law in Jonesboro.

Outside, Kirk found that Elsie Tonpit's quick thinking had brought aid, but his talk with her was cut short by Sevier, from whom he learned many things.

The tavern crowd, headed by the crafty quarter-breed, Polcher, and the bully, Hester, was negotiating with the hostile Indian tribes and Spain for the extermination of the white settlers, but definite knowledge of the transactions was lacking. The proud, power-loving Major Tonpit, Elsie's father, was also suspected of being allied with Alexander McGillivray, the Creek tribe's chief. Many of the recent settlers were of the Tonpit faction, for through Spanish aid they could sell the tobacco which now often rotted in the fields.

Chucky Jack despaired of hope from the Government but figured on seventeen thousand rifles to back him up. It was his dream to make this borderland into a State.

A hasty interview with Elsie convinced Jackson that her father was carrying on underhand work, and on the way back to Jonesboro he saw Hester returning from Major Tonpit's.

Major Hubbard, whose family had been wiped out by Shawnees in Virginia, drew first blood that afternoon by killing a Creek messenger. A runner from the Cherokees, whose chief, Old Tassel, still maintained a precarious friendship with Sevier, brought the information, and Chucky Jack realized that should the Creeks hear of this it would mean war. Chucky Jack needed time. The Creek messenger had undoubtedly brought news to the major.

Old Thatch of the tavern crowd, too drunk to keep anything to himself, blurted out to Kirk Jackson that Hester and Polcher had quarreled and that Polcher had come out the master.

A piercing whistle penetrated the glade and Kirk jumped behind a tree. In a moment Polcher appeared. With a bribe of a jug of whisky he finally persuaded Thatch to bring back a Cherokee scalp that night. Polcher knew that the scalp of a Cherokee would start trouble immediately.

At heart Thatch was a coward, but the offer of plenty of whisky was more than he could resist, so he set out with Kirk trailing him in the rear. Suddenly old Thatch stopped, and Kirk, from the shelter of the woods, saw the reason. Thatch had discovered the body of the dead Creek messenger. It was an easy solution to the problem for Thatch. Now he could secure a scalp without risk.

Kirk hastened with his discovery to John Sevier but Sevier was not at the court-house. It was getting late, and Kirk was to meet Elsie at the edge of the clearing around the Tonpit cabin at ten.

Elsie was not there and the cabin was deserted, but Kirk found a note.

BACK at the court-house Sevier had returned, and Kirk gave him the news. There, too, he read Elsie's note——

"LITTLE TALASSEE."

"——!" gasped Jackson. "Where McGillivray, Emperor of the Creeks, lives."

"I have it!" exclaimed Sevier. "Tonpit has taken his daughter there as hostage. McGillivray doesn't quite trust Tonpit. McGillivray is a gentleman and in case of an Indian war she is safer there than here. But the scalp and Thatch—that is more important. You must go to the tavern and head off Thatch or Polcher'll have war on us in no time."

Through the tavern window Kirk saw that Thatch and Polcher were already together. Thatch handed over the scalp, but Polcher was afraid to trust the old drunkard with too much knowledge, so he used his knife. With a low groan the old man fell to the ground.

Crack!

Kirk's rifle spoke too late. Polcher had the scalp and disappeared, but with the shot he turned back to the window and, seeing Jackson, cried out——

"Help! Jackson the ranger just killed Thatch."

Realizing that, should he be caught, it would mean death, Kirk Jackson ran for his life and, finding a horse in a nearby corral, disappeared in the night.

At the court-house a hasty trial was held and Sevier succeeded in hopelessly confusing Polcher's star witness to the killing. It was finally decided to go out and hunt for the Indian whose scalp Polcher swore he had found on Jackson. The Creek was not found, however, as Sevier himself had carefully removed the body that very night. Polcher, seeing the tables were turning against him, disappeared during the search.

That night Chucky Jack left Jonesboro with two purposes in his mind—one to head off Tonpit and his daughter, the other to find Polcher. Through the lands of the Cherokees he traveled night and day. The trail became more and more perilous.

Click!

Sevier whirled about to face fully a dozen warriors armed with rifles. Resistance would be futile.

Back at the Indian village he was brought before John Watts, a Cherokee chief, anxious to join the Creeks and make war against the whites but restrained by Old Tassel. There, too, he found one of the objects of his quest—Polcher.

Death was the sentence pronounced on Sevier, for the Cherokee runner had not yet returned from Jonesboro and the Indians believed he had been killed by Chucky Jack.

It was then that Chucky Jack's knowledge of Indian lore came to his rescue, for Ayuhwasi Egwahi, the town where he was held captive, was a white town and in white towns the death sentence could not be carried out.

Sevier was safe. Then came Old Tassel to the town and with him the runner whom Sevier had been accused of killing. Sevier was free to set off for the Creek country.

Watts turned to his braves and spoke:

"A brave man goes to Little Talassee. You will not harm him. But if you see a white man turning back you may know he is a coward and treat him as such."

With Sevier went one of the warriors, the Jumper, for Old Tassel feared the results if harm came to Chucky Jack.

On their journey they saw from a distance Red Hajason, the outlaw horse-thief, and among the horses he drove were those of Major Tonpit and his daughter. For years Sevier had longed for a meeting with the outlaw, but now the Jumper restrained him——

"This path is white; you must not."

CHAPTER VII

IN THE MAW OF THE FOREST

ONCE they struck into the old Creek trail the Jumper went on ahead; for this was a red path and the Indian by scouting in advance was supposed to reduce the chances of a surprize attack by Polcher. Near sundown they came to a small creek where the Jumper wanted to camp for the night.

"Let my brother gather wood for the fire while I look about the forest for signs," said Sevier, eager to reconnoiter his back trail.

The man of the Deer clan guessed his purpose and reminded—

"If you are seen turning back, if only for a few steps, there are those who will be glad to kill you."

"I shall not be seen turning back," reassured Sevier. "I go to find signs and kill a wild turkey."

"The forest has eyes that watch you," warned the Jumper. "My medicine has told me that Death walks along the Creek trail."

"Death walks everywhere," carelessly returned Sevier. "And it skips the brave to touch the coward."

Taking his rifle, he crossed the trail and, as soon as he was out of hearing of the Cherokee, turned north and made for a heavily wooded hill. He had noted this elevation shortly before arriving at the creek and knew it would be an excellent vantage point for spying on the back country. He ascended it without detecting any signs of his trackers and lost no time in climbing a tree. The stretch of country he had covered that afternoon was spread out below him in broad relief. For the most part the view consisted of the forest crown, but there were occasional openings, and it was on the nearest of these that he focused his gaze.

He glimpsed nothing that hinted at pursuit. He studied the birds but was unable to discover any symptoms of alarm. This emptiness of the trail puzzled him, for he had been convinced his every step would be dogged until he crossed into the country of the Creeks. Leaving the tree, he descended the hill and, pausing only long enough to knock over a turkey, made his way back toward the creek.

He had reached a point due east from the camp when he was startled by the sharp report of a gun. Dropping the turkey, he ran to the trail and crossed it, thinking his guide was the victim of some treachery. Before he came in sight of the fire he heard the Jumper wailing and moaning, and yet not as one who cries out when physically hurt. In fact, he knew a material wound could elicit no complaint from the Jumper. Slowing his pace, he advanced more cautiously and halted for a moment at the edge of the woods and surveyed the Indian.

The Jumper was lamenting in a dismal manner. He was busy trimming some small branches into tiny rods.

Stepping forth Sevier demanded—

"Was it your gun I heard?"

The Jumper groaned and held up the small rods. There were seven of them, seven being the sacred number of his people. Sevier took one of the rods and examined it. He found it was sourwood.

"You have killed a wolf?" he asked.

"I shot at one, thinking it was a turkey in the bushes," shivered the Jumper. And he snatched up his gun and began unscrewing the barrel. "Now will Kanati, the Lucky Hunter, whose watch-dog the wolf is, be very angry with me. Already I feel myself turning blue."

"The Lucky Hunter will know it was a mistake," soothed Sevier, appreciating how serious a fault it was for any but the ceremonial wolf-killer to shoot at a wolf. "While you finish your medicine for the gun I will go back and get the turkey I dropped."

According to the Cherokee belief the gun was spoiled unless treated at once by a medicine-man. In the absence of a shaman one must make his own medicine as best he could. As Sevier well knew, the incident reduced the Indian's value as a guide and scout to zero. As a fighter he had become nil. Even if the bad spirit could be immediately exorcised from the offending barrel the Jumper would not dare fire it at a lurking foe for fear of making another mistake and rekindling the rage of the mighty Kanati. And those who stalked the borderer along a red path would not show themselves for an open shot.

Disturbed by the incident, Sevier recovered the turkey and hastened back. The Jumper was heating the slim rods over a small fire near the edge of the water and as Sevier came up he commenced inserting them in the gun-barrel. Sevier watched him in silence as he completed his task and leaned forward to place the defiled barrel in the creek, where it must remain for the night.

Turning back, the Jumper plucked the turkey and prepared it for the coals, groaning and grimacing as he worked but taking no heed of his white companion.

"What is it now, my brother?" asked Sevier.

"The Crippler (rheumatism) has me," lamented the Jumper, rubbing his legs. "I have angered a Deer ghost."

"You shall make a prayer to the Black, Blue and White Ravens. The Two Little Men of the Sun Land shall come and drive the intruder away," comforted Sevier.

"Only a shaman can make the prayer," was the doleful reply.

Sevier turned away in disgust. He had counted on the Jumper as a powerful ally for defensive work at least. His woodcraft and sharp ears and eyes would be invaluable in detecting the secret approach of Polcher. Now his superstitions had changed him from an asset to a liability. It was useless to argue with him. Deer ghosts sent rheumatism as a punishment for some deer killed without placating the spirit.

Every one knew that the Little Deer, chief of all Deer spirits, watched over all his subjects. Never could one fall by the hunter's arrow or bullet without the Little Deer standing at the victim's side and asking the clotted blood if "it had heard"; that is, if the blood had heard the hunter begging forgiveness for the life he had taken. Obviously the Jumper at some time had failed to repeat the prayer, and as a result he was now useless.

"I can not sleep tonight. I will keep watch," mumbled the Jumper after the turkey had been served.

"*Siyu!* (good)" agreed Sevier, thankful for a chance to snatch a few hours of sleep.

He had slumbered for several hours when a bullet clipped into the boll of a hemlock near his head and brought him to his feet, rifle in hand. The Jumper, with protruding eyes and gaping mouth, sat leaning against a tree. He made no move to investigate the murderous assault. The fire was down to a bed of coal.

Without a word Sevier glided into the woods. Polcher had had his first try, he concluded. He circled the camp and halted every few rods to locate the enemy by some telltale sound. Unsuccessful, he returned to the fire and lay down at a distance from the dying embers. The Jumper already had concealed himself in some thicket. With the first streak of dawn the borderer rose and dug the Jumper from his hiding-place under a huge stump and ordered him to scout the woods for signs of the midnight visitor.

But the Jumper was now far beyond the point of suffering fear of bodily violence. His brains swarmed with outraged ghosts. Strange superstitions crawled through his thoughts. During the night his medicine-bag had become dislodged from his neck, a most conclusive warning that the Little Deer was greatly displeased with him. The danger of assassination did not impress him as being vital. Bad Luck had settled her talons in his soul; beside which bullets were nothing.

"Will you go or not?" asked Sevier as the Indian tarried by the white ashes and stared timidly about.

"Last night I dreamed of the Little Deer, small as a dog and white," he whispered. "He told me to go back to the village and give cloth to the shaman, who will make me a prayer and give me new medicine. Ah! The Crippler is twisting every bone in my body."

"Old Tassel sent you to go with me," persisted Sevier.

"No chief of the Cherokees gives orders after the Little Deer has spoken," rebuked the Jumper.

"Of course; that is true," surrendered Sevier, now resigned to proceeding alone.

The Jumper dragged himself to the creek and removed the gun-barrel and plucked out the rods, then cleaned the barrel and screwed it in place. That the man he had been so solicitous for the day before should now stand in deadly danger made no impression on him. His own soul was in imminent peril of turning blue. The anger of the Deer ghosts remained unappeased. He could only think of hastening home and bankrupting himself in order to buy the shaman's intercession.

With head bowed and moving listlessly he went up the trail. Only once did a flicker of yesterday's zeal show in his somber eyes; that was when he halted and glanced back to warn—

"You are in a red path now."

Sevier nodded and answered—

"So the bullet fired in the night told me."

The Jumper resumed his gloomy way and the borderer saddled his horse and rode south.

John Watts had charge of the warriors enforcing this trip to the Coosa. The mystery of their failure to appear on the trail while he was spying from the hilltop was now quite obvious. Watts dared not slay until Chucky Jack endeavored to return through the land of the Cherokee, but he was perfectly willing to hold his warriors back and give Polcher his chance to make a "kill."

Polcher, however, must be mounted, which would necessitate his sticking close to the trail if he would not have his victim leave him far behind. Sevier found some consolation in this thought and, leaning over the neck of his horse, he looked for signs and found them within a mile from the creek. The traces indicated that the tavern-keeper had left his horse near the trail while he beat back through the woods to shoot at the shadowy form by the dying fire. On returning to his horse, so the signs read, he had led him some distance, then mounted to spur on as fast as the night would permit.

A glance told Sevier these truths, and red rage smoldered in his heart as he pictured the man withdrawing before him and planning murder, while the Cherokees formed an implacable barrier to drive him to his slayer. His anger did not blind his woods sense, however; and when the forest promised decent travel for his mount he swung from the path and made wide detours. Once he came upon tracks of a horse in the forest mold and decided his foe was indulging in a similar maneuver.

YET the day passed without any demonstration from the man ahead or any sign of the Cherokees behind. Both red and white were in their places, never a doubt of that. At sundown Sevier found water and followed it some distance from the trail. Selecting a small circle of cedars he made his fire where he could not be seen unless the prowler approached very close. He had saved enough of the turkey to suffice him for food; and after the first darkness came to hide his movements he shifted his horse up-stream. Returning to the cedars, he gathered small boughs and rolled them in his blanket. Then, heaping fresh fuel on the fire, he withdrew into the night and took up his position between the sprawling roots of a mighty oak.

He planned to sleep through the first of the night, being confident no prowler would approach the cedars so long as the blazing fire suggested he was awake and alert. The flames would consolidate into coals about midnight; it was then that any lurking assassin would seek the blanketed decoy.

With the woods instinct he timed his slumber accurately. As he opened his eyes and caught the reek of the smoldering fire and beheld the glowing coals staring through the foliage he softly rose to one knee and raised his rifle.

The disturbing voice of a screech-owl raised his *wa-huhu*. Sevier pricked his ears, then relaxed as the dismal notes were repeated. They were genuine and no Indian signal. This corroborated his theory that Chief Watts' men were holding back to give the mixed-blood every opportunity to kill. Something stirred on the borderer's left, a faint rustling. The smoke from the fire would have repelled a night animal.

The darkness made vision useless except as he gazed toward the coals. He aimed his rifle at these. A minute passed and the glowing coals vanished, advertising the intervention of a solid body.

With finger on the trigger Sevier waited for a count of ten, when the explosion of the assassin's rifle tore a red hole in blackness. Almost at the same moment Sevier fired. Something collapsed and the twinkling embers reappeared.

As he fired the borderer fell flat and remained motionless. The silence shut in again. The adventure was finished. Yet Sevier held back until he had reloaded. Then, armed with rifle and ax, he edged forward. He had covered half the distance to the cedars when his moccasin touched something that impelled him to drop his gun and spring forward.

But the form he grasped made no effort at defense. Groping about until he found the hands and had made sure they held no weapons, he dragged the limp figure up to the fire and dropped some dry grass on the coals. The flames flared up and revealed the face of the dead man. It was not Polcher but one of the two whites who had ridden with Red Hajason.

With a smothered exclamation of surprize he drew back under the bushy boughs and crouched on his heels. He observed by the expiring light where the bullet had pierced his blanket and he had no regrets for the death he had dealt. He was chagrined, however, for not anticipating Red Hajason's entrance into the grim game. It was to afford the outlaws a chance to strike, rather than to give Polcher a clear field, that the Cherokees were moving leisurely. Hajason immediately on arriving at Great Hiwassee must have learned from Chief Watts about the white man riding for the Coosa. And how many men had Hajason sent down the trail? Was he one of the trailers?

"I only wish he'd been this chap," muttered Sevier. "That peace law is bad medicine when it stopped me from shooting him on sight."

Wa-huhu called a screech-owl. Another owl answered from the east and another from the west.

"The Cherokees," he murmured, securing his blanket and stealing from the cedars and making for his horse. "They heard the two shots and are puzzled to know how it came out."

Wa-huhu came the call, now much nearer. And the notes were tinged with impatience, as if the dead man had promised to answer.

Sevier threw back his head and sent the answer ringing through the forest aisles.

He was now convinced his life would be in peril every mile of the way to the Creek country. Old Tassel had feared he might come to harm while in the Cherokee country and had sought to evade responsibility by sending the Jumper to guard him. What might happen to him after he crossed the southern boundary did not concern the old chief. But Polcher, Watts and Hajason were determined he should never reach Little Talassee. He summed the situation up by telling himself:

"From now on I must push ahead as fast as possible. I can't be watching for

Polcher and at the same time dodge the gang behind me."

Yet one must sleep and a horse must rest even though two-score Cherokees were stealing like ghouls about the abandoned camp-fire and its dead man. So, shifting his blanket to a deep covert and trusting that his horse would not be found, he slept until sunrise. He sought his horse only after making a circle around the animal; for if other killers were in the vicinity and had stumbled upon the horse they would wait there in ambush, knowing the sun would bring their victim.

But no one was in hiding near the horse; and he threw on the saddle and returned to the main trail without being molested. He rode at a furious gallop and had covered a mile before being reminded of the enemy. A rifle spat at him from the brush and he fancied he felt the wind of the bullet. His only notice of it was to throw himself flat over the saddle-horn and urge his mount to greater efforts.

For several miles he rode at top speed and slowed down only when confronted by a swampy stretch bordering a sluggish creek. Dismounting, he placed his ear to the ground and caught the *thud-thud* of pursuing hoofs. When standing erect he was unable to hear the hoof-beats, and he knew he had ample time to make the miry ford. Walking ahead to test the footing, he soon waded the creek and helped his mount up the bank and gained firm ground. Springing into the saddle, he rode a few rods up the trail and backed off behind some hemlocks and cocked his rifle.

The minutes passed. Perfect serenity seemed to mark the trail and the surrounding forest. Then wild fowls rose from the creeks and winged away. Peeping from his hiding-place, he beheld a white man afoot leading a horse. The animal was a big black, and a second glance noted the white knees. It was Major Tonpit's favorite steed. The man halted at the edge of the swamp and studied the tracks. Then, climbing into the saddle, he urged the horse into the muck. As he lifted his head to examine the opposite bank Sevier recognized him as another of the trio who rode with Hajason behind the drove.

Possessed with the notion of making the fellow a captive and learning something from him about his master, Sevier spurred into the open just as his tracker reached the middle of the ford. Sevier flung up his left hand and cried—

"Up with your hands!"

The man stared at him, nonplussed for a second, then recognized him and threw up both hands and fired. Without raising his own gun Sevier pulled the trigger, the two reports sounding as one. The borderer felt his brown hair twitch; his opponent toppled off into the creek. The black horse wheeled with a shrill whinny of alarm and dashed frantically back over the trail.

"Two!" Sevier ejaculated, pricking on toward the frontier of the Creek country. "That whittles Red Hajason's fighting strength down quite a bit. Unless he's back there I shouldn't stand in any more danger from that direction. Now to watch out for Polcher."

On gaining an elevation that commanded a view of the last ford he reined in and glanced back. A score of Cherokee warriors were swarming across the creek. One stumbled and fell over the dead man, and by the commotion the discovery created Sevier knew they were greatly excited. They carried the body back to the bank, then held a council as though hesitating as to what course they should pursue. Finally a runner was despatched to the rear and the band came on; only now they moved cautiously, as if suspicious of every bush and tree.

Sevier smiled in quiet satisfaction. He was sure he had cleaned out the white assassins, else the Indians would have waited for a third to precede them. For the rest of the day he nursed his speed, walking much to rest his horse and racing madly only when the trail stretched in a straight line for any distance. Whether afoot or flashing down the leafy alley at break-neck pace, he momentarily expected the tavern-keeper to announce his presence with singing lead. Abrupt turns in the path were negotiated carefully, some being avoided by detours. Night found him far advanced on his journey without having discerned any signs of Cherokees or Polcher.

AT LAST he stood at the edge of Little Talassee. His ride through the Creek country had been accomplished by stealth and superb woodcraft and had been uneventful. The wandering bands of warriors that might have intercepted him were avoided without much effort. This taught him the Creeks did not imagine a hostile white man was so far within their territory. It also carried the conviction that Polcher took it for granted Red Hajason's men would prevent his coming. This belief necessitated the conclusion that some of the Cherokee runners has passed round him and informed the tavern-keeper he need bother no longer with Chucky Jack as others had undertaken the work of removing him.

Sevier had timed the last leg of his journey so as to permit an entrance to the village after sundown. From his hiding-place he halted and observed the emperor's home. It was a large handsome house, pleasingly situated back from the river and surrounded by shade trees and extensive beds of flowers. The grounds presented nothing to view which would suggest the red man. It might have been a bit of Pensacola or New Orleans. It was the environment of a white man.

Back of the big house were some two-score neat little cabins that constituted the slave-quarters, while scattered about the residence in a seemingly haphazard manner were outbuildings for supplies and equipment. The entire effect on the borderer was that of a town rather than Emperor McGillivray's private estate.

Near Sevier's hiding-place was a large corral filled with horses. Other animals grazed outside. Waiting until evening had blurred the landscape, Sevier left his horse to graze and ventured among the outbuildings. From the opposite side of the grounds came a chorus of melodious voices as the slaves sang and made merry. Lights sprang up in the big house, fires twinkled before the cabins in the slave-quarters, but the edge of the estate where Sevier reconnoitered seemed deserted.

He had stolen by a sleepy herder and with a horseman's love had paused to admire the many excellent animals when a big bay passed near him and caused him to start convulsively. There was no mistaking the bay. It was one of Stetson's nags, and he would have taken oath it was in Jonesboro the night of his departure. Wondering at the mystery of it all, he rounded a long structure that was used as a granary and dropped as though shot as a light flared up within twenty feet of him.

An Indian had stepped from the end of a cabin and had revived a smoldering torch by swinging it violently round his head. Sevier remained motionless, his travel-stained forest dress blending with the shadows and logs. But the Creek had no eyes for intruders. Besides the torch he carried a shallow wooden platter of steaming food. Intent on his business he walked to the window of the cabin and, after thrusting his torch into a socket, shoved the platter through a narrow aperture beneath the window, grunting unintelligibly all the time.

For the first time Sevier discovered the cabin was used as a place of detention, for there were iron bars across the window. The face of a white man pressed against the bars and the prisoner said something to the Creek.

Sevier sucked in his breath and then gasped:

"Kirk Jackson! So that's the reason for Stetson's nag being down here. Kirk Jackson, and he's a prisoner!"

The Indian removed the torch and walked round the end of the cabin. Sevier glided forward. Jackson had retired from the window. The borderer glanced over his shoulder to make sure no more torches were approaching and, confident no one could discover him unless by physical contact, he seized the iron bars and shook them gently, and called Jackson by name.

There was a moment of intense silence, then a cautious voice whispered —

"Who is it?"

"Sevier. Chucky Jack."

"Good Lord! What luck!" Jackson fervently murmured, and his face came close to the bars and his hand was thrust to grasp that of the borderer. "The door is fastened on the outside. No danger here of any one setting a prisoner free. Throw up the bar——"

He choked the rest off with a groan of dismay and Sevier began to face about just as familiar voice exulted:

"Now, —— you, I have you where I want you! There are no white paths here!"

And before Sevier could close in the newcomer thrust a pistol in his face and pulled the trigger. The weapon missed fire. The borderer's outflung hand caught his assailant's wrist, the other fumbling for the throat.

"Help! Help! This way!" yelled the man in English.

"Polcher!" roared Sevier, forgetting his danger from the Creeks.

And he redoubled his efforts to get at the man's throat.

But Polcher was fighting purely on the defensive and evaded the groping fingers.

"Look out, Jack!" yelled Jackson at the window.

Sevier glanced about to see whence came the new danger and at first thought the cabin was on fire. This fancy was instantly dispelled by the appearance of several torches round the corner, and before he could think to release Polcher and make a break for it a dozen Creek warriors had penned him in against the cabin. Polcher wrenched himself free and with a howl of rage leaped to an Indian and snatched an ax.

"Stand back there, Polcher!" cried a clear, strong voice using faultless English. "What the devil do you mean by prowling 'round my gaol and raising a riot like this?"

As the newcomer passed through the circle Sevier beheld a tall, slender figure of commanding carriage, and a dark, immovable face. The man was faultlessly dressed after the fashion of the seaboard cities. In his hand he carried a light riding-whip. And Sevier knew he had met Alexander McGillivray, Emperor of the Creeks.

"What's the matter with you? Why don't you speak?" sharply demanded McGillivray.

Polcher chuckled sardonically and pointed to Sevier leaning against the wall and informed:

"You have another guest, your Majesty. He was trying to kill me."

"That is why you snapped your pistol in my ear before I saw you, I suppose," dryly spoke up Sevier, now stepping forward to meet the emperor.

McGillivray snatched a torch from one of the warriors and thrust the flame close to Sevier's face.

"And who the devil are you?" he curiously asked, his eyes twinkling in appreciation as they ranged up and down the lithe, upright figure.

"John Sevier, of the Nolichucky, come all the way from Jonesboro to talk with you," was the calm reply.

"——! Nolichucky Jack? And here?" cried McGillivray, his French blood overwhelming his usual Indian taciturnity.

"They call me that among other names," modestly admitted Sevier. "Wishing to see you, I had to come here."

"Well, I admire your courage," declared McGillivray, his dark eyes slightly bewildered. "Why were you fighting with Polcher?"

"Because he snapped a pistol in my face and said he had me where he wanted me. Oh, I'd have jumped him anyway. He only happened to see me first. I've promised myself that some time I shall hang him for a murder he committed."

McGillivray's black brows drew down.

"Have a care, sir," he curtly warned. "Alexander McGillivray is the only man who gives the law in the country of the Creeks."

"If you value your life you'll string this man up now, while you have him!" Polcher fiercely broke in.

McGillivray turned on him, and his voice had an edge as he warned:

"Men who volunteer me advice usually regret it. As for valuing my life, it would be in no danger if Chucky Jack had all his riflemen at his back."

"That is true, sir," warmly averred Sevier. "I know of no red wampum hanging between us."

"Not so fast," muttered McGillivray, staring at him meditatively. "I didn't mean it that way. If there is no red wampum, neither is there any white wampum between us. You've come here without being asked. I'm not yet ready to smoke with you."

"At least we could go inside and sit down and have a talk," suggested Sevier.

"Why, certainly, we can do that. And some cakes and a glass of wine into the bargain," laughed McGillivray. "My surprize at your coming made me forget my hospitality. Only remember, I did not ask you to bring a talk, and we shall talk without belts."

"That suits me perfectly," assured Sevier, taking his rifle from where he had stood it against the cabin when seeking to attract Jackson's attention.

McGillivray waved his hand and the warriors closed about the borderer. Polcher disappeared in the darkness, after loitering to see if he were included in the emperor's hospitality. As McGillivray strode on ahead, leading the way to the big house, he laughed softly but laughed much. As he drew up at the door a slave in gay livery threw it open and humbly stood aside. The emperor slapped his leg with the riding-whip and exclaimed:

"——! But this is unexpected. If I'd offered ten thousand pounds in gold I couldn't had you brought here alive. Behold! You're here without my even asking."

"Yet it cost something for me to get here," said Sevier.

"Meaning just what?"

"Two dead men on the Great War-Path. They tried to stop me."

McGillivray's eyes danced.

"Good! Whose men? Watts'? Dragging Canoe's——"

"Oh, none of the friendly Indians," Sevier interrupted, smiling as he read McGillivray's ardent hope that Cherokees had been slain and that their deaths would precipitate the nation into a war against the settlements. "Merely two renegrade whites. Two of Red Hajason's men."

The emperor's face fell. Sevier only raised the red ax against his Northern neighbors. He eyed the borderer gravely; then a little smile curled his thin lips and he said:

"Those two are better than nothing. If this Red Hajason lived nearer my country I should send some of my young men to break off his head. He rather got the best of me on a batch of horses. And he'll never come himself with a drove; always sends some of his tools."

Sevier yawned. Instantly the emperor stood aside, bowed courteously and lamented:

"I am forgetting myself. Please leave your rifle and belt with the servant. And enter. You are most welcome to Little Talassee—my guest? Prisoner? I wonder!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE EMPEROR OF THE CREEKS

THE McGillivrays were one of the prominent families springing from pre-Revolutionary marriages between the white traders and backwoodsmen and the Southern Indians. The rapid progress made by the Cherokee and Creek nations can largely be traced to such unions, as the white stock invariably was excellent. The descendants from such mixed marriages are not to be confused with some of the Western squaw men's offsprings of later times.

The children of the Southern mixed-marriages, as in the case of Alexander McGillivray, were sent away to seaboard cities, or to Europe, to be educated. These returned with advanced ideas which they soon promulgated among their mothers' people. One result in the South was an early introduction of schoolhouses and the importation of teachers.

McGillivray was an excellent type of the fruit of such a mixed marriage. From his beautiful halfbreed mother, Sehoy Marchand, he had inherited the vivacity and audacity, the brilliancy and polish of the French, and the more reserved traits of the Creeks. From his father, Lachlan McGillivray, he received a shrewd Scottish mind and an ability to solve complicated problems and profit thereby. He was born at Little Talassee in 1746 and was a year younger than Sevier. Of him a President of the United States, more than a century later, was to write—

"Perhaps the most gifted man who was ever born on the soil of Alabama."*

If he was actuated by great ambitions, he entertained them legitimately; for his mother's family of the Wind was very powerful; by inheritance and tutelage he was propelled to aspire to high things. His mental equipment, too, was that of a man licensed to dream of lasting success and influence. If he was crafty, his need, nay, the instinct of self-preservation, required craft. James Robertson, Sevier's old friend, characterized him as being—

"Half Spaniard, half Frenchman, half Scotchman, and altogether a Creek scoundrel."

But Robertson was biased in his judgment because of his hatred for Spain; and there was a strain of Spanish blood in the polyglot emperor. Others of his generation pictured him as fiend and treacherous in his dealings. These charges are not substantiated by any known facts and resulted from the stress and heat of the times. That he played one power against others with consummate adroitness is a matter of historic record—England, Spain and America. He wore the military trappings of the British, he was fond of his Spanish uniform, and finally the insignia of an American officer; the last after Washington made him a brigadier general. But at the time of Chucky Jack's visit to Little Talassee he was all for Spain.

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* Roosevelt's "Winning the West."

As Sevier faced him in the comfortable living-room of the big house it was without the prejudices of many contemporaries. As McGillivray stood by the table and rested the tips of his long, tapering fingers on the polished board, his spare six feet of muscle gracefully inclined toward his "guest," his smooth, dark handsome face portraying only solicitude for the comfort of his new acquaintance, Sevier knew he was in the presence of a gentleman.

After Sevier had seated himself McGillivray tapped a bell and gave an order to the half-breed servant. Wine and cakes were brought. All that surrounded the man reflected the opulence resulting from a partnership with Panton, Forbes and Leslie, whose importations yearly ran to nearly a quarter of a million of dollars. And yet this atmosphere of well-being contained no suggestion of the garish. The impression was that the house of McGillivray always had enjoyed a king's income.

Sinking into a chair across from Sevier, the emperor studied the borderer with courteous curiosity. Then, raising his glass, he gave—

"To your good health and—discretion."

"I thank you. The last is proven by my seeking you in a time of great need," said Sevier.

McGillivray's dark eyes became luminous.

"Ha!" he softly exclaimed. "If you come for assistance you can count on McGillivray of the Creeks to the hilt."

"Not so fast," restrained Sevier. "The need I speak of is yours as well as mine."

"I don't understand you," McGillivray coldly replied. "I know of no personal embarrassment. The Emperor of the Creeks often gives aid. He has never received any."

"A crisis faces the Western settlements and the Creeks. Your nation can not advance if my people go down."

McGillivray sprang to his feet and tossed back his dark hair, snapping his long fingers impatiently and darting angry, yet curious, glances at the imperturbable borderer.

"What kind of talk is this for you to bring to me, a McGillivray of the McGillivrays, Emperor of the Creek Nation?"

"It is because you are what you are that I bother to fetch my talk. I come to the one man in the New World Spain leans on for support. Without you Spain would fall to the ground in this Western country."

The emperor's irritation vanished, his fierce visage softened. Such homage was very sweet, coming from John Sevier's lips. He nodded affably. He had reminded Spain of his own importance in his various consultations with the royal governor, Don Estephan Miro.

"I believe his Majesty, Charles III, appreciates my services," he frankly agreed. "Our treaty of six weeks ago would seem to indicate that much."

"Could I have seen you before June first I would have urged you not to sign that secret treaty."

Leaning across the table, his face alive with resentment, McGillivray hoarsely warned:

"Sevier, beware! Beware how you characterize any compact I sign with Spain. You mouth the word 'secret' as if it were something shameful. I tell you to heed your words, for you are in my power—and I am trying to forget that fact."

"To be in a gentleman's power is to be his guest," was the calm retort.

With a Gallic flinging out of hands and shrugging of shoulders the emperor dropped into his chair, crying:

"You have disarmed me. Suppose we take up your reasons for coming here—a most unusual proceeding you must admit—in view of the 'secret' treaty."

Sevier's gaze strayed to the window as if to peer forth and penetrate the darkness.

"I have two objects," he slowly began. "The most important is to find Major John Tonpit. I admit I had hoped to overtake him before he arrived here."

"Tonpit? What the devil! It appears that all my guests come with but one thought—to see Major Tonpit." And McGillivray did not attempt to conceal his exasperation. "That young man from your settlements, whom I was forced to lock up, would hear of nothing but the Tonpits. The Emperor of the Creeks was merely an agency through which he would find the Tonpits. In truth, he seemed eager to tear the secret from me by blood and violence. He seemed to believe I was hiding something from him. My Creeks wanted to kill him on the spot, but there is much white blood in me and I forgave him because of Miss Elsie Tonpit, who no doubt has turned his head. So I saved him from my reckless fellows by locking him up."

"He's in love with the girl. Why torture him? You are said to be kind to prisoners. Why not let him see her?"

McGillivray groaned and rested his head against the back of the chair, eying Sevier half humorously, half angrily.

"Why not let him see her?" he mocked. "I would give a thousand pounds to see her myself."

Sevier bounced from his chair and dropped back again.

"She has not come? Her father has not come?"

"Curse it! Are you trying to bait me?"

Sevier slumped low in the chair and glared blankly at the emperor.

"Not here," he mumbled. "Then, where are they?"

McGILLIVRAY began pacing the room, a crafty cunning glittering through his half-closed lids as he watched the borderer. Finally coming to a halt before Sevier, he stared down at him and slowly inquired—

"Are you sure, John Sevier of the Nolichucky, that you don't know where they are?"

"If I did, would I be here?" asked Sevier bitterly.

The emperor weighed his show of sincerity and at last accepted it at face value. His lofty brow became worried.

"Polcher said they started for here. He is much disturbed that they haven't arrived. You and Polcher could scarcely be called friends?"

"He's the minor reason for my coming to Little Talassee. I've promised myself the pleasure of hanging him."

McGillivray's lips tightened in displeasure at this bold assertion, and his Indian blood came to the fore and he hissed—

"Be careful how you talk of hanging a friend of the Creeks in the country of the Creeks."

"Alexander McGillivray, Emperor of the Creeks, I do not envy you your friend."

"So?" purred McGillivray. "You would wish me to call James Robertson 'friend,'—the man whom I will drive from the Cumberland if my Creeks do not catch and burn him before he can escape."

Sevier laughed.

"Your chances of burning, or even scaring, Jim Robertson are as good as mine are of becoming Emperor of the Creek Nation." Then harshly, "This man Polcher is a murderer. He killed an old man in cold blood."

"Meaning he intended to kill him," corrected McGillivray with ironical gentleness. "Just as you intended to kill the two white men back on the Great War-Path. Probably Red Hajason by this time is proclaiming you as a murderer. Polcher's 'cold-bloodedness' proves he had a definite purpose. If he had slain without an object I would approve of his hanging. Polcher is very useful to me."

"He's a low-down dog. His usefulness has helped you none in the settlements."

"That remains to be seen after Major Tonpit arrives. Doubtless you think I would do much better if I made friends with the Western settlers. They are a very pious people." And the emperor threw back his head and laughed scornfully. "Let me see; it was eight years ago that some of your settlers at Wolf Hill in Virginia ran to their fort to escape an Indian attack. They discovered their minister of the Gospel had left his books in his cabin. Back they went, those pious men, and returned with the books—and eleven scalps. I am told that after a prayer service they hung the scalps over the fort gate."

Sevier flushed, for the emperor had recited facts.

"The war between red and white has brought out much cruel hatred. Only with peace can kindlier feelings come."

"When the Legislature of South Carolina offered seventy-five pounds bounty for every warrior's scalp I suppose the State was hungrily seeking a permanent peace."

"You should add that the Legislature offered even a greater bounty for the warrior alive," coldly corrected Sevier. "After doing that you could talk till you're white-headed, reviewing the horrible atrocities your Creeks have committed even during your civilized leadership."

McGillivray's gaze became that of a basilisk. For more than a minute he glared at the man so thoroughly in his power. Next, with a startling transition, a most winning smile drove the sullen ferocity from his haughty features and he filled the glasses, reminding:

"Such talk is useless. It makes bad friends. I confess cruelties are practised by the red men. But you didn't come here to tell me that."

"I came to find Tonpit. As a side errand I desire to hang Polcher. And I also came as the result of a talk with Old Tassel."

"Old Tassel?" exclaimed McGillivray, spilling some of his wine.

"I called on him at Great Hiwassee," Sevier explained.

"Great Hiwassee! Indeed!"

"Before Old Tassel arrived I had a talk with John Watts."

"Good God! Are you sure you're not a ghost? You talked with Watts and——"

"And lived to come here? Why not?" And Sevier smiled serenely. "I told Old Tassel I was bringing a talk to you. He is anxious to learn how it results."

McGillivray played with his glass, his gaze following the light darting through the rich depths, his astute mind seeking to unravel the true import of the borderman's astounding assertions. Suspicions of double-dealing on Watts' part came and went, more of a suggestion than a suspicion, for he knew Watts' implacable determination to have done with the Western settlements. The chief of the Chickamaugas could not change. But there was a mystery in Sevier's living to leave the town once he had entered it.

"I'll admit Watts would not receive my talk as I had hoped," Sevier frankly confessed. "He even showed resentment." McGillivray smiled. "But Old Tassel was deeply impressed."

The emperor frowned.

"Old Tassel should be called Old Woman," he muttered. "What was your talk?"

"I told him if he would hold his warriors back from war I would promise to keep the whites from any further trespass on the lands south of the French Broad and the Holston. I told him that an alliance with Spain, through the Creeks, would surely ruin the Cherokee Nation."

"Anything else?" whispered McGillivray, setting down his untasted glass.

"I told him if he made a war-treaty with the Creeks he would lose many warriors and gain nothing. I told him that even if he could kill off all the settlers he would gain nothing, as in the end the Creeks would take his lands."

"Mr. Sevier," murmured McGillivray, "why are you so foolish as to tell me all this?"

Sevier knew that while McGillivray would not countenance unnecessary bloodshed he would never permit any one man to stand between him and the ambition of his life. Still he continued:

"Because Watts dared me to tell the talk to you, and because I told him and Old Tassel that I would do it. But I have more to add."

"I am sorry for you. Go on."

"I wish to tell you, as I told the Cherokees, that the future of the Creek Nation does not depend on the friendship of Spain; that your treaty of last June is with the same people who made slaves of you in the past. And I tell you now, Alexander McGillivray, Emperor of the Creeks, that if you have the best interests of your nation at heart you will cast off this intrigue with Spain and make peace with the central Government."

McGillivray threw back his head and laughed long and discordantly.

"A border-leader turned missionary!" he jeered. "Why, man, I was getting angry at you! Your insolence blinded me to the absurdity of it all. Still, I admire you for going to Great Hiwassee. But when you mention the central Government you remind me that facts are facts. Your Government. Where is it? What can it do? Can it sail a boat on the Mississippi? Can it send its goods to New Orleans? Does it resent any action of Spain's? Or does it meekly bow the head?"

Sevier restrained himself and evenly retorted:

"We are a free people. Just now we need many things. We soon shall have them. War has exhausted us, but we shall make up our strength overnight. We shall never submit."

"Bah! You submit now," wrathfully cried McGillivray. "You are powerless now. Why should you think you will be strong tomorrow? Does weakness breed strength? You say the future of my people and that of the Thirteen Fires are tied up in the same bundle. God forbid! That is what I am trying to escape from. We want none of your future, with its humiliations, with its bending of the knee to Spain. We are free to sail the Mississippi. We trade with New Orleans. When Spain speaks to us she speaks softly. Without our aid she is powerless. My friend, we shall use Spain rather than allow Spain to use us. Her future on this continent is bound up with the future of the Creeks."

And he rose and extended his arms, his inner vision painting a new and mighty empire in which McGillivray of the Creeks and allied nations played a leading rôle.

ABRUPTLY changing and without waiting for Sevier to speak, he became the smiling host again and asked—

"What is it I hear about your separating from North Carolina?"

"As you heard it as soon as, if not before, we did, there's nothing new to tell," Sevier replied. "We are about to set up an independent State and be admitted to the Union."

"So? My agents are careless fellows," sighed the emperor, shaking his head ruefully. "Both careless and ignorant fellows. Why, they actually informed me that the Western settlements have been given to the central Government as North Carolina's share of the war-debt. They led me to believe Carolina was paying her debts with Western land. Never a word about the new State."

"A month from now they'll be telling you about the new State," Sevier answered.

McGillivray simulated a density of understanding and rubbed his head in perplexity.

"I can't comprehend it," he sorrowfully confessed. "The wine must have muddled my poor head. Now let me see. North Carolina owes some five million dollars, a ninth of the national debt, plus three millions unpaid interest. France advanced much of the money and is asking for the interest and some arrangement that ultimately will take care of the principle. North Carolina, not having the five millions, votes to pay some twenty-nine or thirty million acres of land. Now, if I have followed you correctly, the thirty million acres refuse to be considered as the equivalent of North Carolina's share of the debt and insist on being created into a State. It's very bewildering."

"Perhaps it will be clearer if you remember there are some twenty-five or thirty thousand settlers who won those acres and who do not intend to be turned over along with their lands like so many beaver pelts," Sevier replied. "Perhaps you can perceive that the very weakness of the central Government which you have dwelt on is an excellent reason why thirty thousand people will determine the future of the land they alone won and developed. How will the central Government stop us from forming a State if she is unable to resent any insult from distant Spain?"

"I don't think she can." And the admission was accompanied by a smile of genuine amusement. "It's absolutely humorous, the whole situation. A man owes me a thousand pounds. He makes payment. Just as I am about to count the money it hops up and says, 'You can't have me as payment for a debt. But you shall take me as a partner and share with me what you already have accumulated.' What could I do? Perhaps I would demand that my debtor bring me some better behaved money. Eh? What will North Carolina say when she finds she's lost her land and hasn't paid her debt?"

"She'll do nothing," assured Sevier. "There will be no violence, no bloodshed. You don't understand the true temper of the people on both sides of the mountains. We're kinsmen. And your amusing little illustrations make you forget the simple fact that a new State must pay its share of the national debt. Our new State will make good what Carolina owes."

There was a pause for several minutes, each trying to read the other's thoughts. Then McGillivray briskly said:

"You mention August. You're to start building your new State next month?"

"The forty delegates will meet on the twenty-third of August."

"That will give you scant time to visit me and get back and take part in the good work," regretted McGillivray.

"Oh, my presence isn't necessary," promptly retorted Sevier. "If I remain here as your—guest—everything will go along nicely. I arranged for that."

"Then you did consider the possibility of remaining with me for a while?"

Sevier shook his head and frankly answered:

"No. My precautions were taken because of the chance of a Chickamauga knife or a Creek ax reaching me before I got to you. I believed that once I had talked to you I could return—always providing I dodged the dangers of the homeward trail."

"Such faith! Such faith!" murmured McGillivray with a whimsical smile. "Do you know, Mr. Sevier, I must be on my guard against the charm of your personality? I find myself liking you. It's like walking into an ambuscade."

Sevier laughed lightly, pointed to the emperor's full glass and raised his own, saying—

"I drink to the success which will be best for you and your people."

McGillivray started, gazed intently across the table and slowly moved his lips in testing the words.

"—— me!" he cried. "I can't see any snake in the bottom of that glass! It rings honest, even if you and I don't agree on what 'best success' is. You're an honest man, Sevier, and we'll drink it with honesty in our hearts. And I thank you for the spirit which prompts it."

The glasses were emptied just as the servant glided in and passed to his master and gave him a written message. McGillivray read it and frowned blackly, then glanced furtively at Sevier. He hesitated and twisted the paper about his fingers; then he bruskly commanded—

"Show him in."

Sevier appeared indifferent, but from the corner of his eye he watched the emperor's sudden change of expression. Something in the note had aroused the Indian blood in him, had caused him to entertain a suspicion. The door opened and Polcher entered, bowing low to McGillivray and darting a look of hatred at the borderer.

McGillivray motioned for him to advance but did not ask him to be seated. He bluntly began:

"Your note says you have something to tell me about Mr. Sevier which I should know at once. Why didn't you tell it to me when you first arrived?"

"Your Majesty, the surprize of not finding Major Tonpit here, the surprize of finding the man Jackson here, drove it from my mind until John Sevier came. Ever since he entered your Majesty's home I have been trying to get a word to you. Only now have I succeeded."

"Very well; go on. What is it?"

Sevier eyed Polcher closely, anticipating what was coming. The tavern-keeper gazed only at McGillivray and said:

"The man Jackson, acting under Chucky Jack's orders, killed your Creek messenger. He was seen to do it by a settler, who was murdered to close his mouth. But before the witness died he told me of the crime."

"What? What's this?" roared McGillivray, turning to glare at the composed face of the borderer. "What have you to say, Sevier?"

And the long hands opened and closed as if searching for a deadly weapon or an enemy's throat.

"Do you believe it?" Sevier quietly asked.

"You heard the charge. Answer!" thundered the emperor.

"Pardon me; but if you already believe it, it is useless for me to answer," Sevier replied in the same level voice.

McGillivray was nonplussed by this method of defense and finally demanded of Polcher—

"How do you know this to be so?"

"I saw the messenger's scalp on Sevier's table in the court-house."

"——! Sevier, you must speak now. Polcher either has hung himself or you," McGillivray bitterly exclaimed. "My messenger has not returned. I have thought nothing of his absence because he was to guide the Tonpits here and the woman would prevent a quick journey. Now answer the charge."

"A scalp of a Creek was placed on my table in the court-house by Polcher," the borderer slowly informed. "I had never seen it until it was placed there by Polcher. The Creek would not have been killed if you had sent him openly to Jonesboro. I knew nothing about him until he was dead. You sent him by stealth——"

"You admit he was slain?" hissed McGillivray.

"Certainly. But not by Kirk Jackson, as this dog says. The scalp was taken to Polcher by an old man crazy with drink. The old man was to get a jug of whisky if he brought a Cherokee scalp—to Polcher."

"He lies! —— him! He lies!" gritted Polcher.

McGILLIVRAY glanced from the flushed face to the composed one. Sevier coolly continued:

"Your common sense will tell you there can be no question of veracity between me and your tool. The old man who took the scalp did not, however, kill the Creek. I am frank to admit that, although he was a tool of Polcher's and did as Polcher commanded—as he believed."

"A Cherokee scalp," mumbled McGillivray, his anger subsiding for the moment as he recognized the advantage to his cause had a Cherokee been killed and scalped by a Western settler.

"He lies—" began Polcher, but Sevier came to his feet and grasped a decanter, warning—

"You say that again and I shall brain you; no matter how much I dislike to make a scene in the home of McGillivray of the Creeks."

"Keep your mouth closed, Polcher, until I speak to you," the emperor harshly commanded. "Sevier be seated—please. Now, Sevier, suppose you enlighten me as to what you know about this."

Sevier readily complied, omitting only the fact that he knew who had killed the messenger.

"Jackson was in the bush and overheard Polcher's bargain with the old man and came and told me about it. I directed him to waylay the old man and take the scalp from him. Polcher had demanded a Cherokee scalp for his whisky. The old man believed he had found a dead Cherokee, and he scalped him. Jackson believed the scalp belonged to a Cherokee; so did I until I saw it. I did not want any scalp to be paraded at the tavern, where Polcher and his men would make use of it in inflaming the Indians."

"But this Jackson fled! He didn't wait for an investigation," reminded McGillivray in an ominous voice.

"If he had killed a Creek he scarcely would have fled here," said Sevier. "He was being chased by a tavern mob. I was away from the village. He already knew the girl was to go to Little Talassee. He was crazy to overtake her. That was the true reason of his leaving Jonesboro in the night without even waiting to let me know where he was going."

"True, he would be a fool to come here after killing my man," mused McGillivray. Then with fresh suspicion, "But how did he know the girl and her father were coming here?"

Sevier was unwilling to implicate the girl.

"From something he had learned," he countered. "I can tell you exactly what he learned, and how, but not in the presence of this man."

"We still have the death of my Creek to clear up," reminded McGillivray, scowling blackly. "This old man found the dead body and scalped it?"

"Believing it was a Cherokee. And I went and buried the body so it could not be found and be made the cause of a border war," Sevier replied.

"But some one did kill the messenger." With a lightning glance at the tavern-keeper he demanded, "Will you say Polcher killed him?"

Sevier was human and the temptation was strong. The rascal was seeking his life and would hesitate at nothing to accomplish his ends.

"No, I can't say that. I only wish I could. Polcher didn't kill him. He only killed the old man he had hired to bring in a scalp."

"Then you do know who killed him?" cried Polcher.

"You speak as if you were surprized," growled McGillivray.

"I'm surprized he admits as much," Polcher defended.

McGillivray nodded for the borderer to proceed.

"Not in the presence of that man," Sevier refused.

"By heavens, Sevier, you're taking a high hand!" the emperor passionately cautioned. "Please remember that any man worthy to stand in my presence is worthy to hear any explanation that involves him in a serious matter. I demand you tell me what you know concerning the death of one of my people."

Polcher grinned triumphantly.

"After he leaves the room I'll tell you who killed your Creek," retorted Sevier.

"You'll tell in his hearing, or else the Creeks have forgotten their knack of making a man talk," rumbled McGillivray.

"Between such men as you and I that is boy's talk," rebuked Sevier with a smile. "I'm disappointed in you."

"I'm quite in earnest. This man, my paid agent, makes a charge against you—a prisoner—in your presence. You exonerate him of the killing and confess that you know the murderer. You also admit Polcher doesn't know. I stand back of my men. I'll put threats aside and appeal to your sense of justice. If Polcher doesn't know who killed the Creek it is only right that you should speak before him."

Sevier elevated his brows and stared thoughtfully at the ceiling. Finally he said:

"There is justice in what you ask. It can't make much difference, as he will never dare go back to the Watauga settlements to serve you again. I've decided to tell you what I know. The Creek was killed by an Indian-hater, a man whose entire family was butchered by Indians. The deed was done unknown to any settler; otherwise it never would have been committed. We will cover your dead with many presents. But as you sent him secretly into our settlements, with orders to skulk in the bushes, thereby giving the impression to any who might see him that he was there for mischief, I should say part of the responsibility for his death was yours, Alexander McGillivray.

"Had you sent him to me he would have been unharmed; for then he would have come openly, just as the Cherokee, Tall Runner, came and departed in safety. However, your Creek is dead, and the fanatic will not be handed over for you to kill. There's the whole truth. Young Jackson is as innocent of the whole affair as you are."

"I believe you, Sevier; but you talk big when you say the Creeks shall take no reprisal," McGillivray bitterly observed.

"You can kill me or Jackson, but the settlement won't turn over the half-crazed slayer of your Creek," Sevier calmly reiterated. "It is for me to say that you talk big when you complain because your secret messengers aren't received and protected in Jonesboro at almost the moment you hold as prisoners Kirk Jackson and myself, who came here openly."

"Came here to make trouble," ventured Polcher.

Sevier directed a sleepy smile at the tavern-keeper and remarked to the emperor:

"I've been thoroughly honest and above board with you. Suppose you ask your trusted agent to be the same."

"You can't make his Majesty believe I'm anything but honest with him," defied Polcher.

"*Kul!*" grunted Sevier. "You killed a war-eagle out of season, Polcher. It has spoiled your medicine. The Great Crystal of the Cherokees would show you floating in blue shadows. Death is very close to you. Now tell the emperor why your friend Red Hajason went to Great Hiwassee and took with him the horses rode by Major Tonpit and his daughter when they departed from Jonesboro."

Polcher was astounded. When he could master his tongue it was to give a shrill cry of alarm, and for a moment his smug mask of complacency slipped and revealed the stark terror in his soul.

"Lies! Lies!" he choked.

McGillivray was fairly bewildered by the unexpected revelation and glanced swiftly from the borderer to his henchman.

"Tonpit's horses in Red Hajason's hands," he mumbled. Then fiercely, "Polcher, look at me! So. Eye to eye! What do you know about this?"

"Nothing! Nothing! The man lies!" Polcher's frightened voice persisted.

McGillivray swung about and for nearly a minute searched the depths of Sevier's steady blue eyes.

"No," he softly concluded, "he speaks the truth."

Raising a silver whistle to his lips, he blew two short blasts. Almost instantly a dozen warriors glided into the room and encircled the three men. Pointing to Polcher, the emperor ordered:

"Take this man away. Turn out the dogs."

"I've served you, McGillivray——"

"What?"

"I've served your Majesty faithfully. I give my word of honor I will not try to escape until after you have investigated this ridiculous story."

"You will come to no harm if you're innocent; and the Emperor of the Creeks knows how to make up for his mistakes with many presents. But if you have played me false you will—if you are wise—cut your own throat tonight. If you attempt to leave the grounds the dogs will get you."

"I do not wish to leave the grounds," sullenly replied Polcher as they led him away.

AFTER the warriors and their prisoner left, McGillivray remained staring at the door, seemingly forgetful of Sevier. Black care was worrying his handsome countenance. Speaking gently, he at last asked—

"Do you know anything about the Tonpits, besides what you've told?"

"I only know that the man called Hester was the man Polcher used in communicating with Major Tonpit. Hester took orders from Polcher. He left Jonesboro the night the Tonpits set out. The settlers have long believed he is mixed up with Red Hajason. If he is, why not Polcher, his master? I had supposed he went to guide the Tonpits to you, taking the place of the dead Creek. I was surprized to find no trace of the Tonpits on my journey here. Red Hajason had their horses. It must follow he has the Tonpits. Polcher's a bad one. You're foolish to trust him."

"He's always been humble enough," muttered McGillivray.

"Humble? Why, he considers himself to be a better man than you, Alexander McGillivray," laughed Sevier. "And a better man than Tonpit. In Jonesboro he played the part of tavern-keeper and played it well. But, harkee, McGillivray of the Creeks, you've had dealings with no man as crafty as he. Show him an advantage in taking your head in a basket to any State capital, and he'll try for the reward."

"His ambitions fly above a money reward. He seeks a high position under—in the new order of Western affairs. Yet what you tell me looks bad." And he sighed as if weary from continued disappointments. "I've depended so much on Major Tonpit."

He blew his whistle, this time but once, and two men entered. Speaking to them in the Creek tongue, he directed:

"You will start immediately for Great Hiwassee and learn if Red Hajason has brought horses there." Then to Sevier, "Describe the animals." Sevier did so, and the description was repeated to the men. "You will find out where Red Hajason is now. One of you will return to me with what you have learned. The other shall remain until he has seen John Watts. Ask him in my name if he knows anything about the white man called John Tonpit, and about the white girl, Tonpit's daughter. This gives you my voice."

And he slipped a curiously carved ring from his finger and handed it to the elder of the two men.

As they withdrew he said to Sevier:

"We'll drop it until I receive word from Hiwassee. I admit part of the blame for my Creek's death. Let that go by. I want to talk with you as friend to friend.

"You imagine me to be a blind tool of Spain's. You couldn't make a greater mistake. I hold and intend to hold this Southern country. I welcome Spain so long as Charles III helps me to strengthen my grip on it. Spain knows that if she tries unfairness with me she loses what she now holds. Spain has fleets and needs the fur trade. Her day has passed in Europe. What she gets she must get over here. She will pay well for what she gets. We have something to sell. She is willing to buy. What is there wrong in that?

"If your Western settlements could sell what you raise, you would be very powerful. But you are hemmed in. The thirteen States are satisfied with the Atlantic coast. That is all they have cared for. They have no sympathy with over-mountain development. They are not strong enough to combat Spain, and they know their Western country can amount to nothing so long as Spain holds the Mississippi. Spain holds the Mississippi. Now she asks the Western settlements to form a Government under her protection. The thirteen States will not try to stop you from doing that.

"You say you won't put on the yoke of Spain. Spain doesn't ask you to wear a yoke. She knows she can't win what she must have—our trade—by force. To stop the intrigues of France and England she does want a Government over here—a new republic will answer perfectly—that will be in sympathy with her and favor her in trade. Outside of a commercial advantage, Spain asks nothing from you or me. It only means Spain's backing while the new Government west of the Alleghanies gets on its feet. Once the new Government stands alone and needs no European help Spain would retain her trade advantage because of her just and kindly treatment of us during our development."

He paused and Sevier shot in—

"What do you get out of such a combination?"

With great dignity McGillivray promptly answered:

"I should still be Emperor of the Creeks. I should retain a monopoly of the Creek trade and, very probably, should have a voice in the affairs of the Cherokee Nation. No, no. Don't misunderstand me. I shall not interfere with the rights of the Cherokees. John Watts and others are convinced of that. My influence would always be to knit the two nations firmly together. Once that is accomplished we will be invincible."

"Against whom?"

"Why, against any trespasser," McGillivray slowly replied.

"Possibly against Spain?"

"If she attempted any injustice, yes. And we'd whip her, too. For she would have to bring the fight to us or lose all she has over here."

"Invincible against the new Western republic?"

"If the Western settlements treated us wrongly. Certainly."

"What if you should decide we were treating you unjustly, when, as a matter of truth, we were treating you fairly?"

"Spain would easily adjust any such differences."

"But, knowing you could defy Spain, would you permit her to settle disputes in our favor?"

For the first time during their interview McGillivray completely lost control of himself. Leaping up, he struck the table and overturned the wine. Kicking over his chair, he began raging from one end of the room to the other, his dark face furious with passion. Sevier replaced the decanter and rescued a book from a puddle of wine. Gradually McGillivray's emotion subsided. Returning to the table, he righted his chair and sank into it, staring gloomily at Sevier.

"Do you know," he softly began, "you have been in great danger. You have the quality of making men like you to an unusual extent. You also have the knack of maddening men. For the moment my Creek streak told me to kill you. I am glad I did not give into it."

"So am I," said Sevier, pulling a pistol from the breast of his hunting-shirt. "For I should have acted on an impulse, perhaps, and defended myself."

McGillivray's eyes half closed as he watched Sevier twirl the pistol.

"You came in here to have wine and cakes," he murmured. "And you brought a deadly weapon with you."

"You have a long knife inside your coat," smiled Sevier.

"What do you propose doing?"

"Make up for my part in our bad manners," laughed Sevier, taking the pistol by the muzzle and handing it across the table.

McGillivray's eyes flew open. He smiled graciously and murmured:

"A gallant gentleman. I meet you half way. Wine and weapons do not go good together."

And pulling a knife from inside his coat he tossed it and the pistol on a couch at the side of the room.

SPEAKING sorrowfully, he said:

"Sevier, I have just shown you a wonderful world and you interrupted to ask silly questions. God knows you nearly drove me out of my reason. I can't bear to have commonplace objections thrown at me when I am painting a picture of new kingdoms. I took you up where you could see yourself as one of the great men of America and you didn't seem to sense it."

"If you showed me the whole world from the top of a mountain it wouldn't tempt me any, Alexander McGillivray, so long as I knew misery and injustice dwelt at the foot of the mountain."

"Will you go with me to Governor Miro at Pensacola?"

"Only as your prisoner—by force."

"But Miro is a friend of your friend, of the man who hates me, James Robertson."

"Miro has been friendly with Jim; but Jim understands that Miro never lets courtesy or friendship interfere with his master's orders. If Charles III says for Miro to do a thing, Don Esteban Miro does it, regardless of whom it hits or hurts."

McGillivray bowed his head and sighed, and said:

"Then I must go beyond what I expected would be necessary, beyond my own inclination; for it is not according to my best judgment. But so be it. You are a stubborn man, John Sevier. I will agree with you that we can form no allegiance with Spain. Say the word and I will inform Don Miro to that effect."

"What is that word?"

"That you will form an independent Government out of the Western settlements."

"No!"

"The central Government will not oppose you."

"That makes no difference."

"The West is ripe for the move."

"The move will not be made."

"You will have twenty thousand riflemen. I will pledge you twenty thousand Indians. You shall have supreme military command. Together we can laugh at Spain, oust her from the Mississippi and bury the ax so deep there shall be no more burning of cabins, or of prisoners at the stake. It will mean the absolute end of Indian warfare, and a prosperity such as men never dreamed of."

"Once for all, McGillivray of the Creeks, I will form no alliance with Spain. I will work to establish no separate Government, as that would dismember the Union. There is one thing I will do, whether we create a new State or fail."

"Well?"

"I will protect the Western settlements against the Indians, be they Creek or Cherokee."

"By ——! You throw a red ax. Then this is the ax I hurl back to you," snarled McGillivray. "My treaty with Spain will stand. I shall surely win over the Cherokees. The Chickasaws, who now cling to Robertson's hand because of their chief's friendship for him, shall join us or be stamped out. We will blot out the Western settlements. The Ohio and Northwestern tribes are eager to join us. If you remain alive to see the border cabins in flames you will remember the offer I made to you in all friendliness. Then will you decide whether you followed a straight or a crooked trail."

"If it must be so," sighed Sevier.

McGillivray tapped the bell and rose. Sevier also stood. The servant entered and made a low obeisance.

The Emperor of the Creeks stared moodily at the borderer, hospitality struggling against resentment. Almost sullenly he said:

"If you will give me your promise you will not attempt to escape from the village during the night, I shall be pleased to have you shown to a guest room. The bed is better than what we furnish in the cabins."

"I have no desire to leave the village tonight. I promise. But I would like to know if my horse——"

"Your horse has been brought in and has received excellent care. I take your promise to save you from a disagreeable death. It is impossible for you to escape. The dogs are out. See here."

Stepping to the window, he leaned out and whistled shrilly on his fingers.

A wild chorus of baying answered the signal, and in the faint moonlight Sevier beheld a dark patch swerve from between the cabins, running close like wolves. They swept up to the house with two men behind them. Halting beneath the window, they leaped up to caress their master's hand. For a minute or two McGillivray called them by name and stroked the heads of the milling mass. They were gaunt, tawny brutes, one being more than a match for any man unarmed.

Stepping back from the window, McGillivray remarked:

"It would be hard for one to escape my pets. They are a special breed. A streak of the mastiff, and the rest is pure devil. They're trained to touch no one in the village; but wo to the man who goes out of bounds against my orders. Give me a thousand such and I'll chew up the foolish Chickasaws and never lose a warrior."

Sevier shuddered and followed the servant. His room was on the first floor and at the end of the building. It was large and comfortably furnished. The furnishings were what one would expect in the homes of the seaboard rich but with perhaps more of the Spanish mode than would be found in the North. On a shelf in the corner was a row of books, but Sevier was not overfond of books and gave them scant heed. What did arouse his interest was a wall decoration formed of hunting-knives, arranged so as to suggest the rising sun, the polished blades being the rays. In the collection were homemade weapons of sturdy strength and the more gracefully shaped pieces of European origin.

The windows were open and there was nothing to prevent Sevier from stepping out on to the grass ground. After the servant had left him he remained at the window and looked across the silent, empty grounds to where Jackson was imprisoned in the cabin. How surely had the young Virginian answered to the call of love, even to entering a deadly trap. Such was the drawing-power of love for a maid. Such should be the whole-souled quality of a man's love for his country.

And where tonight were the Tonpits?

Were they alive, and if so, in Red Hajason's camp? It sickened him to think of the girl in that rough environment, her austere father powerless to protect her. If Jackson hadn't been captured and could have known of their plight he could have rallied some riflemen—but that was as useless as wishing for last year's sunshine.

"Oh, for a few days of liberty and fifty of my riflemen!" groaned Sevier. Then came the wild, fantastic thought of calling on McGillivray and offering to go and bring the Tonpits to Little Talassee. He believed McGillivray would gladly take him at his word. He would object to the riflemen being employed but he would willingly furnish a hundred or more Creeks.

However, that would be playing McGillivray's game, Spain's game, the devil's game. If Jackson could get back to the Nolichucky and arouse the men—the inspiration thumped against his mind like a blow. If only Jackson could escape and run the Creek and Cherokee gantlet! The Cherokees would be on the alert to prevent Chucky Jack's return; Chief Watts would see to that. A man must need have wings to escape the ferocious dog-pack. Still such chances were created for men to take and laugh at. There could be no doubting the young Virginian's zeal for the business; nor his woods cunning in putting it through.

Stepping to the book-shelf, Sevier tore a blank page from one of the volumes. On a table in the corner was a quill and a horn of ink; for McGillivray of the Creeks handled a quill as readily as did any of his white contemporaries and kept much writing material easily accessible. The borderer wrote a few hurried lines to Stetson, explaining his fears and exhorting the settler to raise enough men to make the raid a success.

He refrained from speaking of his own plight and simply said the raid on Red Hajason's camp could be made without any fears of an Indian attack during the riflemen's absence from Jonesboro. Sanding the note, he carefully examined the fan of knives on the wall and selected four of extra length, stout of haft and keen of edge.

This done, he extinguished the candle and returned to the window. The problem of the dogs remained. They ran in a pack and kept patrolling the edge of the extensive grounds. Sevier assumed from what McGillivray had said that he would not be attacked while inside the grounds. But to be discovered would be to spoil his plans. He leaned far out the window and looked and listened. The slave-quarters were on the other side of the house. The pack had gone in that direction when McGillivray dismissed it.

SLIPPING out the window, the borderer stole to the corner of the house and waited until he glimpsed a shadowy mass passing behind the slaves' cabins. Then retracing his steps, he bowed low and ran swiftly, keeping to the shadows of the outbuildings as much as possible. The light was faint and barely sufficient for him to distinguish one cabin from another, but his sense of location carried him to the window with the iron bars. Gliding up to this, he whispered Jackson's name.

"Who is it?" Jackson murmured, cautiously approaching the window.

"Sevier! Here are four knives and a message. Put two knives under your bed. I will remove the bar from the door. When you hear me whistle, look out and see if the dogs are making for the big house. If they are you must make for the corral and mount a horse and ride for your life. Give the message to Stetson. It orders him to raise some riflemen to go with you to the camp of Red Hajason, an outlaw, I believe you will find the Tonpits prisoners there. Take them back to Jonesboro and hold them even if you have to make Major Tonpit a prisoner. On no account is he to reach this place. The note explains all——"

"But you? Can't you come with me?" pleaded Jackson.

"I must stay. I've given my word. Remember, when I whistle. If the dogs don't come to me then you must decide for yourself how much risk you can take. Don't try it unless you believe you can make it; as that wouldn't help Miss Elsie any. To be caught by the dogs may mean death. Look out for the Cherokees if you get through. Good-by."

Retreating in the shadows of the buildings, he beheld the pack trotting toward the big house. They were just getting clear of the slave-quarters and Sevier ran for the window, knowing it was a matter of seconds. He gained the low sill without the pack sounding an alarm and noiselessly vaulted into the room and let out his pent-up breath in a deep sigh of content.

"And you gave your word!" spoke up a harsh voice.

Peering about, he sought to pierce the darkness but was baffled. He knew it was McGillivray but he could not see him.

"I thought I saw a slinking figure outside. I couldn't believe it was you. I felt ashamed to come down here to make sure. I believed I was insulting you by coming. Now I find you've broken your promise."

It was on the tip of Sevier's tongue to deny the accusation hotly, but that would arouse the emperor's suspicions as to the truth.

"A man may walk about the village without breaking his promise not to leave the village," he sullenly replied. "Where the devil are you?"

"Walking in the village!" bitterly derided McGillivray. "You started to escape and became frightened at the dogs."

Sevier said nothing. McGillivray repeated under his breath:

"Frightened at the dogs? Hah! You've been trying to find Polcher."

Still Sevier made no answer. McGillivray opened a door and secured the lighted candle he had left outside. Holding it high, he strode up to the borderer and scanned him closely.

"Your eyes gleam as if you had succeeded in something. Did you find Polcher?"

Sevier smiled, refusing to speak. McGillivray made to set the candle on the table, and his keen gaze at once noticed the absence of the four knives. He leaped to the wall and a glance told him they had been hastily wrenched from their fastenings.

His right hand plucked a pistol from inside his coat. Leveling it he demanded—

"Where are those knives?"

"Ask Polcher," defied Sevier.

"If you have harmed Polcher I will kill you," promised the emperor. Still keeping an eye on his "guest," he stepped to the window and sounded his whistle. Up raced the pack in answer to the familiar call, with the two keepers trotting behind them. Scrambling and crowding, the brutes leaped up until their red eyes glared into the room. Without shifting his gaze from Sevier, McGillivray extended a hand and fondled whatever head came within reach. To the keepers he said:

"One of you stay with the dogs. The other run to Polcher's cabin and see if any harm has come to him."

The order was promptly obeyed and Sevier's spirits rose as he observed the man was making off in the direction of the slave-quarters.

"You still refuse to talk?" demanded McGillivray.

"I prefer to wait," was the calm reply.

The dogs continued leaping up at the window; their master kept up his blind caresses. The one guard stared stupidly at the tableau of the two men, one with arms folded and counting the precious minutes, the other with a pistol ready in his hand and frowning heavily.

At last there came a patter of feet, and McGillivray straightened and brought the pistol to bear on Sevier's deep chest.

"If the verdict is against you I have decided to shoot you here," he grimly informed.

"I reckon I wouldn't deserve it. I never promised not to harm Polcher. I've told you several times I fully intend to hang him."

"Good heavens! You couldn't have hung him—alone!" cried the emperor.

Up dashed the messenger and sagged against the window-sill and waited for his master to turn and address him. But McGillivray would not remove his gaze from Sevier and commanded over his shoulder:

"Speak, you fool! The man is waiting to know if he lives or dies."

"The man Polcher was asleep," panted the man.

"Asleep? You mean he is dead?" cried the emperor, beginning to contract his trigger-finger.

"No, your Majesty," faltered the man, fearing a rebuke for stating the truth. "I found him asleep. He woke up and cursed me. I told him I was obeying your Majesty's orders. At that he sprang from his blankets and began dressing."

"Alive!" exclaimed McGillivray, slowly lowering his pistol.

"If your Majesty please, I hear some one coming," spoke up the second keeper.

In another moment Polcher stood outside the window, blinking at the candle and impatient to learn what it all meant.

"I am sorry to have disturbed your rest," McGillivray harshly informed. "But my guest has been roaming about the village, and four of my knives are missing from the collection. It seems it was a false alarm." Then, wheeling on Sevier, he shouted, "—— it, man! Why don't you speak? It's dangerous to play tricks on McGillivray of the Creeks."

"I wish to remind his Majesty that he has done me the dishonor of accusing me of breaking my word and of having killed a sleeping man. When I execute Polcher he will be wide awake," Sevier haughtily replied, fighting for more time.

"If the All Powerful would tell me what has happened perhaps my poor wits might put it together and guess the truth," meekly suggested Polcher, inwardly raging with impatience.

McGillivray, deeply irritated, briefly narrated the fact of Sevier's theft of the knives and of his absence from his room and his return to it.

Polcher, standing shoulder-deep among the dogs, gripped the window-sill, his eyes flaming as he sensed the truth.

"He took the knives to use against your pets. But he returns without them. So he must have taken them to some one else. Perhaps to the man called Jackson. I advise——"

With a shout of rage McGillivray leaped through the window and ran toward the cabin, the pack at his heels. The emperor's passion subsided as he saw the cabin door was closed; then flared high as a closer approach revealed it was unfastened. He tore the door open and Polcher leaped inside and kicked about the narrow confines and swept his hands over the rough pallet of straw.

"He's gone!" shouted the tavern-keeper as he bounded over the threshold.

A guard, who had run to one side, now sounded a second alarm.

"The horses are loose!" he screamed.

"To the woods with the dogs! To the woods! Take command, Polcher! Let the dogs have him if they catch him! Arouse the warriors! That man must not escape!"

CHAPTER IX

POLCHER'S LITTLE RUSE

ALL night the search for Jackson worried the forest. Sevier slept but little as McGillivray occupied an adjoining room and walked the floor much of the time, pausing only when some messenger came to report or when he deemed it necessary to leave the house to give fresh orders. At sunrise Sevier from his window saw the wearied pack limp into the village, the two keepers staggering behind them, kept moving by the animals' haul on the leashes. As the dogs were passing the borderer's position McGillivray ran out of the house and demanded of the keepers——

"Why are you back without the white man?"

"He took to water and washed out his trail," grunted one of the Indians. "He rode fast, although the night was very black. We lost time at the creek in picking up his trail again. Then we followed only to find he had taken to water again. With the dogs on the leash we made slow headway."

"On the leash? I told you to let the dogs have him!" thundered McGillivray. "You should have loosed them."

"We did slip two free, Petro and Little One, the fiercest and swiftest of the pack. We sent them after him the moment we left the village," was the humble reply. "Petro did not come back. We found him where the white man first took to the water. Here, Little One!" And the Indian pulled forward a huge brute whose sides had been wickedly slashed. And he explained, "The Little One crawled back to meet us before we found Petro's body. Came back like this. I was afraid to set them all free, fearing they would come up with him one or two at a time. And surely he is a black spirit."

The emperor's eyes turned toward the open window and made Sevier think of a flash of a knife as it leaps from the sheath in the sunlight.

"I have my guest to thank for this," slowly remarked the emperor. "My best dog gone and another all but done for. And the prisoner still free. Take the dogs away and see they are well fed and rested."

He would have turned back to the house, but Polcher now came galloping from the forest, his horse in a lather. McGillivray called out to him and the tavern-keeper raced up and sprang to the ground.

"The dogs have failed. What about you?" asked the emperor.

"I think I shall get him," replied Polcher. The words sent a chill to Sevier's heart. "Your warriors are spreading out to the east and west to cut in ahead of him. And I have sent runners north to warn the Cherokees to bar his path. I do not see how he can escape."

"Luck seems to be against me," complained McGillivray. "The prisoner told me he had spent much time in the Shawnee country. He must be very cunning."

"Let him be as cunning as the whole Shawnee Nation and yet he must pass through the neck of the bottle before he can escape," boasted Polcher. "I don't care how much he wanders about in the Creek country. He is our prisoner until he strikes into the Cherokee country and gets beyond the Hiwassee River. Even should he by some miracle dodge the Cherokees of Great Hiwassee and the lower villages and cross the river he will stand but a small chance of reaching the Tellico. But should he do that still the Cherokees will stick at his heels till he reaches the French Broad. We'll see if his Shawnee cunning can carry him that far!"

Polcher's confidence and enthusiasm invigorated McGillivray's spirits and his somber countenance lightened.

"You have done well, Polcher. I think we shall bag the young man yet."

He walked toward the house with more confidence in his step, but on second thought halted and called after Polcher, who was leading his horse away——

"One word more, Polcher: how far will my Creeks go?"

"Until they get him," was the laconic answer.

"I'm afraid that won't do. The Cherokees might not understand. They may think I'm riding rough-shod over their land," McGillivray worried.

"Not at all, your Majesty," hastily reassured Polcher. "The messengers I sent are intelligent fellows. They will explain the situation fully to John Watts. He will welcome any aid that will stop the man from getting back to the Watauga settlements. It's as much his game as it is ours."

"We'll hope so. But after I've eaten I think I will send a talk to Watts and Old Tassel to make sure they understand."

"If your Majesty please, I'm sure Watts will be in hot pursuit of the man before your talk can reach Great Hiwassee. As for Old Tassel, I didn't think it wise to have the messengers see him. He's weak. The less he knows about things the better it will be. Time enough to explain to him after we've caught our man."

McGillivray frowned a bit, inclined to disfavor any risk of arousing the Cherokees' resentment, but accepted the advice by nodding his head and waving his hand in dismissal.

In a few minutes there came a soft tap on Sevier's door and a house-servant entered and informed——

"My master asks Mr. Sevier to join him at the table."

Sevier made ready to follow and noted that the servant was curiously studying the knives on the wall.

"Only the four are missing," laughed the borderer, suspecting the man was under orders to make sure the "guest" had not secreted a blade on his person. "I am unarmed. Lead the way."

With a deep bow the servant did so, and Sevier soon stood in a pleasant side room. McGillivray was at the window. A table was set for two. The emperor haughtily returned the borderer's greeting and motioned for him to be seated.

After the servant had served them and had withdrawn Sevier blandly asked——

"How goes the chase?"

"You should know. You were at the window when I talked with the Indians and with Polcher," was the cold reply.

"Jackson is a brave fellow. He deserves to escape," Sevier stoutly maintained.

"My four knives helped him," McGillivray grimly reminded, his gaze becoming baleful.

"Then thank God for the knives!" Sevier devoutly cried.

"I would much prefer he had died than to have lost Petro," the Emperor dissented.

"Then, shame on you, Alexander McGillivray!"

"Ha! You've saved up more bold words over night," gritted the emperor, leaning back in his chair. "Be careful, Sevier. You are not in my white town of Coosa. You are in the red town of Little Talassee on the Coosa River. A vast difference."

"I'm where a dog is valued more highly than a clean young American."

"American? It's seldom I hear the word," McGillivray grimly taunted. "I fear it will never become the fashion. But do heed my warning about picking your words. I am irritable this morning, inclined to act on impulse."

"I feel quite safe, sir. You have too much white blood in you, and you have mixed too much with white men, to descend to barbarism."

"I don't know that," slowly replied the emperor. "When I first learned of my dog's death—by my own knives—my Indian blood ran very hot. And I tell you seriously, Sevier, and I mean every word of it, that while I prefer to win my ends without resorting to brutality I will allow no white man's comfort or life to stand between me and success. I have saved many captives from the torture; but if the giving of you to my Creeks to play with would bring me success you should pass under the skinning-knives most surely."

Sevier bowed gravely and retorted:

"I believe you, McGillivray of the Creeks. And if my passing under the knives of your warriors will block your schemes, then my hide is very much at your service."

McGillivray could not suppress a flash of admiration. With a short laugh he said:

"After all, we may be able to remain friends. You make people like you, even those who try to hate you. I thought I hated you during the night. This morning I was positive of it. But I can't. —— me! You are a man. Still, I shall send you to your death in cold blood if I decide your death is necessary for my plans."

"I understand you perfectly," was the cheery reply. "There are times when a liking for a man goes only so far. Don Esteban Miro has a genuine liking for Jim Robertson, yet he'd cut his throat if he had the chance and his royal master should command it."

And the borderer attacked the deer venison with much gusto.

McGillivray had no appetite and was content to play with his food while his gaze wandered to the window, watching for a messenger to bring good news. Suddenly he pushed back his chair and leaped to the window. Several Indians were emerging from the mouth of the trail and a white man rode in their midst.

"—— me! But they've got him!" he triumphantly cried.

"Where are your Creek eyes?" Sevier contemptuously demanded. "The white man is much too large for Jackson. He wears a beard. Great Injuns! It's Red Hajason!"

McGILLIVRAY'S exultation changed to bitter disappointment. The newcomer certainly was not Kirk Jackson; nor did he bear himself as a prisoner, although surrounded by warriors. He still carried weapons in his belt and held his head high. As the emperor stared Polcher ran across the open ground and intercepted the cavalcade. He exchanged a few words with Hajason, then turned and ran toward the big house.

"The rascal has courage, but he shall hang if any harm has come to the Tonpits," muttered McGillivray.

"Your man Polcher seems to be acquainted with him," murmured Sevier between mouthfuls.

The horsemen passed from sight. McGillivray conquered his desire to run out and interrogate the outlaw and resumed his chair at the table, forcing himself to an appearance of indifference. He had barely swallowed a mouthful of the meat when the servant came in and mumbled something.

"Bring my pistols," the emperor curtly commanded.

The servant turned to a small desk and produced a brace of Spanish weapons, long of barrel and profusely inlaid with gold and silver. Thrusting one of these into the bosom of his coat and dropping the other in his lap, McGillivray next directed——

"Now show both of them in."

Polcher came first, bowing low. Behind him with head erect stalked the huge form of Red Hajason. Just inside the threshold the outlaw halted and stared insolently at the emperor.

"Red Hajason, of the Hiwassee and the Tugalo Rivers," announced Polcher, standing to one side. "He was picked up by your Majesty's Indians while on his way here with an important talk for you."

"I've heard of you, Hajason," lazily informed the emperor. "And I never heard anything good. I was just telling John Sevier that if you have done what you're charged with doing I probably shall have to hang you."

Hajason opened his bearded lips in an ugly grin and replied——

"My neck'll stand a heap of hangin', I reckon. An' it ain't never been cracked yet. But I ain't here to talk 'bout hangin'. I come to talk trade."

"Well, what have you to trade?"

"A white man an' a white woman."

"Major Tonpit and his daughter?"

"Them's the two," grinned the outlaw.

"—— your insolence!" softly hissed McGillivray, the hand in his lap closing over the pistol.

"It's been done many times," grunted Hajason, beginning to grow angry.

"You and Polcher worked together in this?" demanded McGillivray.

"Work with him? With that double-faced varment? Red Hajason works alone," growled the outlaw.

"But the man called Hester helped you in this little coup," said McGillivray, now folding his arms and leaning back to stare the outlaw squarely in the face.

Again the outlaw's brutal good humor asserted itself, and he chuckled and informed:

"I don't count Hester as a partner. Jest a dog-gone fool. Howsomever, I'll admit it was him what put the game up to me an' showed me there was money in it. That's all I asked of him."

Darting a wrathful glance at Polcher, McGillivray bitterly reminded:

"Hester was your trusted tool. You pick your men well!"

"I shall kill him when I meet him," promised Polcher.

To the outlaw McGillivray said:

"Suppose you say just what sort of a bargain you wish to make with me. After all, we may be able to trade."

"An' why not?" eagerly cried Hajason, the lust for profit showing in his gleaming eyes. "I've got somethin' ye hanker for. Ye've got somethin' I want."

"Yes; I want the Tonpits. What will you take?" promptly asked McGillivray.

"Two thousand pounds," was the cool response.

"If it was possible for you to leave this village without being torn to bits by my dogs I would advise you to peddle your wares elsewhere," said McGillivray. Then he let himself go, and in a voice that trembled with passion he denounced, "You base-born cur! You dare step between McGillivray of the Creeks and his ambitions? You dare dictate what he shall pay for stolen goods?"

With the snarl of a wild animal Red Hajason dropped his hand to his belt, but Polcher pushed the muzzle of his pistol against the shaggy head, while the emperor's folded arms opened and a second pistol was brought to bear. Polcher deftly slipped his hand along the giant's belt and removed his weapons, stood back from him and looked inquiringly at the emperor, his eyes asking whether he should shoot or not.

Hajason realized his peril. Fighting down his anger, he moistened his lips and apologetically said:

"Hard words always rile me. I come here alone to drive a bargain. Why shouldn't I have some ambitions as well as ye? Ye don't own the Tonpits. They come to me without my askin', an' I've held 'em in camp. Tonpit has money an' offered me a thousand pounds, gold, for to be free along with the girl. Afore bargainin' with him I come to see if ye'd outbid him. That's all."

For a full minute McGillivray pondered over his frank statement; then he smiled whimsically, replaced his pistol and bruskly admitted:

"Yes; you have a right to take your profit. If you had accepted the major's thousand pounds he would have come to me. I'll give the two thousand for the safe delivery of him and the girl here at Little Talassee. Two thousand pounds for the two. McGillivray, Emperor of the Creeks, does not have to haggle over terms. When can you have them here? Time presses."

Red Hajason combed his beard and turned to stare at Sevier. Pointing to the borderer he said:

"If that man can be kept here, so's he can't interfere, I'll not lose a minute in gittin' back to my camp. I'll return here, fetchin' the Tonpits, as fast as hossflesh can bring us."

"Mr. Sevier plans to spend the Summer with me," quietly assured McGillivray. "Should he go away, it will be on a very long journey and in a direction opposite to the one you will take in returning to your camp."

Polcher smiled. Hajason was slower to catch the point, but when he did he broke into a loud guffaw.

"—— my liver, McGillivray," he cried, "but ye're a neat one! 'Opposite direction!' To the Twilight Western land, eh? Ha! Ha! An' takin' along mighty little skin on that fox body of his, eh? Good! I'll eat an' git a fresh hoss from ye an' start back on the hump."

"The sooner the better," insisted McGillivray.

Polcher handed back the outlaw's weapons and the two departed, Polcher bowing himself out in his best landlord's manner, Red Hajason giving his back abruptly and shaking the table with his heavy tread.

"He doesn't seem to have much respect for you," remarked Sevier, smiling as he beheld the flare of anger flushing McGillivray's face.

"The dog! The miserable dog! And he's all white. Mark you that, Sevier! There is no Indian blood in him. He's a completed product of your race."

"Once I get back to the Nolichucky I hope to improve the race. We've weeded out quite a few of his kind," Sevier lightly responded.

McGillivray tossed his pistols aside and left the table. Standing beside Sevier's chair, he abruptly began:

"We've been making believe a bit. We've talked at cross-purposes. I've no more time to be polite. It's business from now on. Will you give me your word not to try to escape if I allow you the freedom of Little Talassee?"

"No, sir!"

"Will you promise not to escape until after the Tonpits arrive?"

"No, sir! I propose to escape at the first opportunity."

"But you came here to see them."

"I shall leave here to stop their coming here."

"If that's your frame of mind I must make you a prisoner," regretfully decided McGillivray. "I'm honestly sorry to have to do it. I enjoy your company. I get small opportunity to talk with intelligent men. But you're meddling with big affairs. You threaten to annoy me, to embarrass me. I would be a fool to permit it."

"There's something much larger, much grander, than the schemes you're planning, Alexander McGillivray. Your little ambitions to pose as ruler of a Creek-Cherokee federation, under the protection of Spain, will never be realized. Shut me up in your stoutest prison or kill me, but don't be foolish enough to believe that my dropping out will give you a clear trail. Only after you've killed the soul of some twenty-five or thirty thousand people west of the mountains can you place your feet on the path leading to a realization of your mad dreams."

McGillivray picked up the pistols and thrust them under his coat and firmly replied—

"Yet I will enter that path and walk to the end even if it requires the death of every settler this side of the Alleghanies!"

Sevier sprang up and sternly demanded—

"Send for my jailer."

McGILLIVRAY summoned the servant and directed him to bring Polcher and six warriors. While they waited, the two men stood with the table between them, eying each other in silence. Through the window Sevier glimpsed Red Hajason riding into the forest. Then the door opened to admit the tavern-keeper and the Creeks.

"This man is my prisoner," McGillivray tersely explained. "He is to be watched closely, but no harm is to come to him unless he is caught outside his cabin. If he manages to get out of his cabin, if only a foot from the door, he is to be killed. You, Polcher, will be responsible for him. You can command what guards you may find necessary. I give him into your charge, and see to it you can produce him when I send for him."

"Rest easy, your Majesty, that he shall be produced when wanted," Polcher joyously promised.

"Take him away."

Sevier fell in between the warriors and was led out-doors. Polcher walked behind him with drawn pistol.

Without glancing back the borderer said—

"You'd like mighty well to have me make a bolt for it."

"I'd love to have you," hissed Polcher. "And some one we both know is a big fool to bother with you for a second. You thought you held the whip-hand after I killed Old Thatch. You reckoned you was through with me when I quit Jonesboro on the jump. But all scores come to a reckoning sometime, and here you are in Little Talassee; and before Winter comes I'll be back on the Nolichucky burning a few of our old friends. But I promise you Bonnie Kate shall not burn."

With a low groan Sevier gripped his fingers till the nails cut the flesh. Maddened with rage, he still had mind enough to know Polcher was endeavoring to force him into open violence. Then the pistol at his head would crack and the tavern-keeper would be exonerated for killing a refractory prisoner.

"Remember this, Polcher. You're to die by the noose, and I'm going to be the hangman," whispered Sevier.

"Bah!" laughed Polcher scornfully.

It was the cabin Jackson had been imprisoned in that they took him to. As he was passing through the doorway a servant, sent by McGillivray, came running up with a roll of blankets. Polcher considered this forethought to be a sign of weakness in the emperor and hurled the roll viciously at the borderer's head and swung the door and dropped the heavy bar.

Pausing outside at the window he softly gibed:

"McGillivray is a mad fool. After he clears the way Spain will rule through men like me. I tell you this as I'm positive you won't repeat it to the emperor. And when I am ruler I shall find a bonnie wife in Bonnie Kate. That is, if I decide to marry her."

Sevier bent and found one of the two knives Jackson had concealed under his pallet of straw and glided cat-like to the window, the knife held behind him. Never suspecting he held a weapon, yet rendered uneasy by the awful anger raging in the blue eyes, Polcher gave ground and saved his life. Keeping the weapon behind him, Sevier contented himself with saying—

"You will pay for everything when you pay for your neck."

Polcher began to feel afraid of the imprisoned man. There was something so inexorable in the borderer's low-pitched voice; it was more menacing than any raving in overtones. Sevier could not harm him —now. But let him get free and no obstacles could prevent him from reaching the man who had dared to utter the name of Bonnie Kate in his boasts. Retreating still farther from the white face at the window, the tavern-keeper selected three Creeks and ordered them to guard the cabin until he returned.

Two of the men remained in front to watch the door and window, while the third guarded the rear, lest by some miracle Chucky Jack should break loose. Although the Creeks were thrown in contact with Sevier less often than their Northern brothers, his reputation had lost none in traveling South. That their emperor ranked him high was shown by the hospitality at the big house. The man Jackson had not been taken there.

In spite of his taunts Polcher was far from satisfied with the situation. The feeling grew upon him that so long as Sevier lived so long would he have a Nemesis on his trail. To have Sevier a prisoner meant nothing. He had been a prisoner at the big house. The only difference in his status now was the change of quarters. Then, too, McGillivray might change his mind. His soul was not the red man's, and he admired his captive.

Should the Tonpits arrive and should the emperor decide his success was sure, it would be like him to release Chucky Jack and have him up to the house for wine and cakes again. Then the inevitable would happen—Chucky Jack would escape. And there was a deadly quality in Sevier's last threat which inclined Polcher to great uneasiness. So the obsession grew up in his mind that neither the fate of Spain's nor of McGillivray's plans was so important to him as the knowledge that Sevier had breathed his last.

"So long as he lives my neck is in danger," he muttered. "—— him and his talk of the noose." And he rubbed his neck nervously. "If I had a little more Cherokee in my veins I'd begin to think I was a fool to kill that eagle. Now if he was to die—but he is not to be harmed! He must be treated like a high and mighty gentleman, curse him—unless he breaks loose. Ah! There's a thought. If some one would kindly help him get clear of the cabin where I could shoot him down or feed him to the dogs. It's worth thinking about."

Only the more he meditated over the idea the more pronounced became the problem of securing a trustworthy tool. Even did he bribe a slave or Indian to unfasten the door to Sevier's little prison there remained the risk of the accomplice being detected and telling the truth. In event of violated orders McGillivray would have the truth if he dragged out a man's heart by the roots to get it.

He even considered the possibility of inducing some one to open the door and then shooting him down and openly branding him as a traitor to his master. But such a scheme demanded that he be alone with his accomplice when the trick was played. The arrival of an Indian on the scene would spoil the game.

"There would sure to be some slip up," he told himself. "—— it! There's but one way left. I must free him myself, shoot him in his tracks and let McGillivray suspect the whole nation. No one being guilty there will be no one to confess. But what if I didn't hit him? What if he escaped or he killed me. Huh! There is one way that's sure. Kill him inside the cabin, then drag him out and claim I jumped him outside."

But how to make it appear logical that Sevier had escaped without help? There were two points of egress possible, providing a man had the proper tools and plenty of time—the door and window. To cut through the door from the outside, so as to make it appear the job had been done from the inside, would require the presence of a knife in the cabin. There would be no time to hack a hole through the stout door after shooting the prisoner through the window; and Sevier would be certain to investigate any assault made on the door while he lived. The same objections were encountered in considering the window.

"It's got to be done mighty quick," summed up Polcher. "The door's got to be thrown open the minute he's potted through the bars. He's got to be dragged outside before the sound of a shot disturbs any one."

For the rest of the day he worked on the idea and at last came to a solution, which, after testing it from all angles, gave every promise of success because of its simplicity and directness. At no time would it oust him from control of the situation, and he whittled it down to so fine a point that only one shot would be necessary.

Shortly before sunset he visited the slave-quarters and, selecting a dull-witted man, directed him to take a platter of food and carry it to the prisoner after the slaves had had their supper. This would mean an hour after dusk. In concluding his directions he touched the fellow's belt and said—

"And have a knife in there so he won't try to reach through the window and catch you as you pass the pan through the hole."

The slave's eyes grew round with fear. He had no heart for any errand that suggested danger. And it was whispered among the slaves that even the emperor was afraid of this white man. Returning to Sevier's cabin, he dismissed all the guard but one. To him he said:

"When the slave comes with the food you may go. He will stay until relieved."

The Indian grunted and Polcher hurried to his own cabin and secured his rifle and a brace of pistols.

Making into the woods, he skirted the village until in the rear of the locked cabin. The beauty of his scheme was the assurance no harm could come to him if it failed. If it did not work tonight, then tomorrow night. When it did work the warriors and their emperor would be called to the spot by excited cries and the sound of a shot. They would rush up to find the slave dead, stabbed with his own knife, and the prisoner dead outside the open door. The explanation would be simple.

The slave foolishly entered the cabin with the food instead of thrusting it through the slot. Sevier, quick to see his chance, had snatched the fellow's knife and inflicted a mortal wound and then sprang from the cabin to fall before Polcher's pistols or rifle.

* * *

SEVIER was as hungry for night as was Polcher. The two knives cached under his straw bed would soon permit him to dig out enough iron bars to squeeze his slender body through the opening. He must work softly so as not to alarm the guard outside. But should one of the guards discover him at his task the fellow must be quieted and secured. For such a contingency he thanked McGillivray for the blankets; at the edge of sunset he swiftly used his knife and turned one blanket into narrow strips and braided these into a tough rope.

When Polcher came and gave instructions to the guard Sevier hid the blanket-rope under the bed, fearing lest the tavern-keeper should venture to peep inside and discover signs of his handiwork. Early in the day, when Bonnie Kate's name fell from the rascal's lips, the borderer would have forgotten his plans to escape and would have been content to flash a blade through the bars and rip open the lying throat. Now he was calmer and would accept nothing but escape. Polcher could pay up later.

He stood at the window as if idly looking out on the dusk-littered opening, but in reality cutting deep into the window-sill to get beneath the end of a bar. The one guard was impatient to be relieved and was giving scant heed to the cabin. The knives were strong and keen and the task was far easier than Sevier had anticipated. He soon came to the end of one bar and, testing it gently, knew he could bend it back and upward with one push of his powerful arm. Leaving it, he assailed the next, estimating that he must loosen four.

The dogs had not yet been turned out, and, whereas he had originally planned to take his time and escape during the night, he now was determined to make the break while only the slave was on guard. He rejoiced that Polcher's voice had carried the information to him. A slave would be much easier to deal with than a warrior. He would succumb to fear and refrain from attempting to give any alarm. Whether or not he should escape directly after receiving his supper would depend, however, on whether the dogs were loose or chained in the slave-quarters.

He worked feverishly and, having learned the knack of the job, made better time in cutting to the embedded end of the second bar. The sun by this time had waded deep into the forest and the film of shadow over the village blurred objects a few rods from the cabin. The guard began grumbling in a minor tone and walked a dozen feet from the cabin and stared impatiently toward the fires in front of the slave-quarters. The slaves were singing and dancing about the fires, and the warrior grew very peevish. The third bar was ready to be forced clear.

The guard stalked back in front of the window but never bothered to give it a glance. Turning abruptly and grumbling more forcefully, he retraced his steps and walked some distance from the cabin. Now Sevier caught the wild melody of a slave drawing near, singing, perhaps to bolster up his courage. The Indian called sharply to him. The man came on slowly, his song hushed. The Indian went to meet him and paused to warn him not to leave the cabin until relieved. The slave slowly came on, bearing a steaming dish in one hand, his other nervously feeling of the knife in his rawhide belt. The fourth bar was cut free at the lower end.

Standing to one side of the window, his strips of blanket in one hand, Sevier thrust the two knives into his belt to have a hand free for receiving the pan when it came through the slot. He heard the slave halt at the end of the cabin near the door. He thought he caught the murmur of voices. The discovery startled him, although it was possible the slave was muttering to himself. Then he stiffened and his jaws clamped together as there came a muffled groan and the thud of a heavy body falling to the ground.

His first thought was that Kirk Jackson, unable to break through the Creek and Cherokee lines, had doubled back and was to repay his debt by setting him free. A moment of silence, then the sound of a heavy body being dragged to the door. The next moment the window was blocked by a man's head and shoulders.

"Sevier," whispered a low voice. "Where are you?"

Had it been Jackson, the door would have been thrown open immediately. Turning his head away, Sevier fiercely whispered—

"On the bed."

And plucking a knife from his belt he tossed it on the straw.

"I can make you out now!" hissed Polcher, reaching his pistol far between the bars. "—— you! This is where I win!"

He fired and found his arm caught in an iron grip. A hand was fumbling at his head. He essayed to throw it off but decided its efforts were weak and futile, and he believed he had wounded his man. To make sure he reached his free hand for his second pistol. The grip on his right wrist was amazingly strong for a wounded man. A panic seized him as the pistol caught. Then something touched the back of his neck, pressed against the sides, began crowding his Adam's apple. He tried to shriek. From a great distance came Sevier's metallic voice, crying:

"So you'll bother Bonnie Kate, eh? You killed an eagle out of season. It spoiled your medicine. The noose, you know——"

McGILLIVRAY of the Creeks stood in front of the big house when a muffled shot rang out. There followed no outcry, yet the shot was a sinister omen to the emperor's moody train of thought. He could not locate the sound but believed it came from the direction of Sevier's cabin. He walked in that direction until he met a warrior. Of him he asked—

"Where is the man Polcher?"

"He stands at the window of the cabin, talking with the white man," answered the warrior. "I heard a gun shoot. I ran to look and found him. I spoke and asked him if anything was the matter. He didn't speak. Just stood with his face against the bars. There were no other guards there."

Instantly suspicious that the tavern-keeper was planning to play him false, having been won over by the borderer's magnetism, the emperor ordered:

"Call the warriors and surround the cabin. Tell Polcher to come to me. If he refuses, bring him."

The warrior melted away in the darkness. He had scarcely departed when a figure broke through the gloom and McGillivray greeted:

"I was just sending for you, Polcher. My men tell me you were guarding the cabin alone."

"Your messenger must travel far to find Polcher," returned a well-known voice and Sevier, now standing by the emperor's side, presented a pistol. "Polcher is dead. Died by the noose, as I said he must die."

McGillivray stood as one paralyzed. Finally he choked out:

"God! Is it possible!"

"Take me into the house!" hissed Sevier as a loud yell broke up the evening calm. There came the patter of moccasined feet running swiftly. "Inside, quick!"

Propelled by the prodding pistol, the emperor led the way into the house, panting:

"—— you, Sevier! Polcher was right. I should have killed you! You bribed one of the Indians."

"With what?" growled Sevier. "A slave brought me my supper. Polcher killed him at my door. Then tried to shoot me through the window. The game was simple. I, dead, was to be dragged out. Polcher would claim the slave opened the door and that I killed him. Then he came up and killed me; that would have been his story. With a strip of your blanket round his throat he now stands dead, tied to the only iron bar in the window I did not remove. He was caught in his own trap. Take me to the room where I slept last night."

The pistol muzzle was all compelling, and, picking up a candle from the hall table, McGillivray with bad grace led the way into the apartment containing the collection of knives.

"But you can't escape!" exploded McGillivray, his bewilderment slowly passing. "I don't imagine you plan to murder me. Even if you did, you couldn't get clear of the village."

"McGillivray of the Creeks, it's a chance for me to escape or your life," sternly admonished Sevier. "Do as I say and you live, although it may mean my recapture. Try any tricks and you're a dead man as surely as Polcher is a dead man."

McGillivray of the McGillivrays was now his old unperturbed self and whimsically declared:

"My life comes first. What will you have?"

"Order your servant to bring your horse and rifle to this window. I took Polcher's pistols. I shall want powder and bullets. Then tell your Creeks that I escaped to the south and order them to take the dogs and go in that direction."

The village was now in an uproar. Torches were flitting back and forth; men were surrounding the big house. The dogs, infuriated by the confusion, were raising their ferocious voices, demanding to be released for action. As Sevier finished a hundred warriors ran to the lighted window, calling out to their master that the man Polcher was dead and that Little John had escaped by using black magic. Some terrible evil spirit had slain a slave, wrenched the iron bars from the window and tied the dead Polcher up to the window.

The Emperor stood in the open window. Sevier stood against the wall at one side with the pistol raised and leveled.

"Now earn your life," whispered the borderer.

"Take the dogs and go south!" roared the emperor. "He seeks to escape that way. One of you bring my horse and rifle, powder and bullets here to this window. Off! All of you."

The crowd rushed away. The dogs, however, had already been brought out and taken to the cabin. They had found the scent and were following it to the big house.

"You must stop them!" warned Sevier.

McGillivray thrust his head from the window and energetically repeated his command. The keepers could not understand why their terrible pets should be so keen to enter the master's house, but McGillivray of the Creeks was not to be questioned and they began belaboring the animals and dragging them away. A servant came up, skirting the milling mass of struggling brutes, leading McGillivray's favorite mount. The emperor groaned and muttered—

"I'd prefer you had taken all my horses rather than to take King."

"He will be unharmed and you shall have him back, providing he is not torn by your pack or shot by your warriors," comforted Sevier.

"Curse you, Sevier——"

"Go ahead. Curses never hurt any one yet," encouraged Sevier as the emperor halted.

"It's a foolish habit. I'll wait," mumbled the emperor.

"Send the servant away."

McGillivray obeyed. By this time the dogs had been dragged to the southern limits of the village and the warriors were already scouting the trail that led to the gulf. Sevier made the emperor face the wall and with a sheet ripped from the bed tied his hands behind his back. Forcing him to be seated on the bed, he proceeded to secure his ankles. When he improvised a gag the royal prisoner opened his mouth to shout for assistance, but the pistol silenced him.

"John Sevier, I'll have your life for this," he whispered.

The borderer thrust the gag into his mouth and made it fast, remarking:

"You're getting off easy. It would be better for the settlements if I could bring myself to stop your plotting for all time. If we meet on the border there will be no quarter."

With that he leaped through the window and into the saddle and galloped away to enter the northern trail. The few warriors and slaves he passed recognized the horse and marveled that their master should be riding north after sending the dogs and the fighting-men to the south.

CHAPTER X

THROUGH THE NECK OF THE BOTTLE

SEVIER'S lead in the race for freedom depended largely on the length of time McGillivray's plight should remain undiscovered. The dogs would balk at going south and their keepers would soon realize the fugitive's trail lay not in that direction. Given the sunlight, the borderer's fleet mount would cover miles before a pursuit to the north could be organized. But night reduced the pace of all horses to a mediocre plane. Sevier entered the trail on the gallop but was quickly compelled to rein in and proceed cautiously.

He rode with his ears tuned to catch the first note of alarm behind him. He had advanced but a short distance when he came to a shallow stream. He turned his horse into this and followed it slowly toward the east. He believed it was the same water Jackson had taken to in hiding his trail. On leaving it he swung back to strike into the Great War-Path, going by the map he carried in his mind. As he broke through a patch of broom-sage on the side of a low hill and entered the hard-packed path the sinister sound he had been anxiously anticipating floated to him on the evening air; a long-drawn bell-like note.

"Sooner than I had expected," he grimly muttered, shaking the reins.

Now he rode recklessly, bending low to escape the clawing boughs and trusting to his horse to keep to the path. The animal soon splashed into running water. Reining in with some difficulty, he forced the animal to ascend the stream for a quarter of a mile, this time traveling due west. Then followed a repetition of his first maneuver of beating back to the main trail. He planned to follow the Coosa until he had crossed into the Cherokee country when he would leave it below Turkey Town. Riding across country, he could pick up the river again and follow its head-waters until in the neighborhood of the Hiwassee.

On reentering the trail he had covered but a short distance when he was startled again to hear the baying of the dogs. He had counted on the animals being delayed on reaching the two streams. Not knowing whether he had followed the streams west or east, the pack would have to course the streams in both directions before correcting the fault.

"Sharp devils, those Creeks!" he grumbled. "Outguessed me, or learned a lesson from trying to catch Jackson. They either divided the pack, half searching the creeks while the other kept straight ahead, or else they've paid no attention to the water and are holding all the brutes to the path."

This suspicion impelled him to ignore the next stream. The two detours already made had cost him time and distance. He could tell by the increased volume of the baying that the chase was closing in. Then followed a short period of silence so far as the chase was concerned, only to be snapped by a frantic, exulting chorus close behind him.

"They've let them loose!" he gritted, driving his heels into the quivering flanks.

To be overhauled and dragged from the saddle was not on Sevier's program. He pushed ahead until the trail opened into a strip of meadow land bounded by the waters of the Coosa and a sharp slope of a rock-littered ridge. Here it was possible to distinguish form. Dismounting, he led the horse up the rocky slope and tied him to a tree. Stumbling on, he came to what he was searching for, several boulders so arranged as to afford protection on three sides. To get at him the dogs must enter the pocket by the one mouth.

Placing his rifle and pistols before him, he slipped off his hunting-shirt and wrapped it about his left arm. Sticking his two knives into the ground, he settled on his heels to wait. Somewhere in the night a whippoorwill—*waguli* the Cherokees call it because of its song—was monotonously reiterating its plaintive cluster of notes. From deeper in the forest came the screech-owl's *wa-huhu;* but of human and four-footed enemies there was never a sound.

When the crisis broke it was so close at hand as to seem to be in his very face; a triumphant chorus of the bloodthirsty trackers. Sevier's wide gaze made out several vague forms racing up the slope to where reared the frightened horse. He counted five, one running behind the other, their undulating bodies suggesting the approach of a monster serpent.

The horse shrilly voiced his terror; the pack swerved aside and came for the rocks. Raising his rifle, the borderer carefully covered the leader and fired. Down crashed the brute, its mates leaping over the dead form and dashing onward. Dropping the rifle, he snatched up the two pistols and held his fire for a brace of seconds. He caught one a dozen feet from the opening between the rocks and disabled a third when it was almost upon him. Seizing the knives, he rested on one knee and plunged a blade through the heart of the fourth as it leaped against him. The impact of the huge body bore him backward but he managed to regain something of his balance as the remaining animal closed in and grabbed for his throat and instead caught the bandaged arm.

Stabbing and slashing, Sevier pressed the fighting, and after a few moments of convulsive struggling the beast suddenly relaxed, his teeth still locked through the tough folds of the hunting-shirt. It required much effort to release the shirt from the ferocious jaws. Having succeeded, he ended the misery of the wounded beast. He was bruised and battered and bore some slight abrasions on the left arm, but otherwise was uninjured. Recovering his weapons, he took time to reload them, then limped to his horse and climbed into the saddle.

He was satisfied the dogs were far in advance of their keepers and that the rest of the pack were still on the leash. Returning to the trail, he resumed his flight. Far behind him sounded the ominous baying, but he gave it scant heed. The dogs at the creek had picked up his trail, but the fight among the rocks had increased his optimism. His star was in the ascendency.

FOR three days and nights Sevier made his way north, each hour bringing him nearer the neck of the bottle through which he must pass. Jackson's flight undoubtedly had aroused the country. McGillivray's runners despatched on the heels of the young Virginian must have sent a cloud of Cherokees across all paths. The Creeks in large numbers were beating the country as they advanced. It was obvious to the borderer that McGillivray had been promptly released and had lost no time in calling back the men and dogs from the southern trail. But there had been no sign of the dogs for the last seventy-two hours.

There was a menace in the rear, however, more deadly than the dogs—columns of smoke which warned the Cherokees to be on the watch for a fugitive. He tried to make himself believe that Jackson had won through, but there ever remained a doubt. The young ranger was cunning in woodcraft, else he never would have brought his hair back from the Ohio country. But to run the lines of John Watts' men demanded a bit of luck along with forest wisdom.

As Sevier drew near the neck of the bottle late in the afternoon of the third day he decided the race was not to the fleet. He would save time and insure his final escape by remaining concealed until the edge of the chase had dulled itself. Once his enemies believed he had broken through the search would broaden and move north to the Hiwassee, leaving him the comparatively easy task of following along behind the hunters.

Possibly his shift in tactics was influenced largely by the nature of the country he was entering. To the east and north stretched an extensive area of swamp land, dotted with hummocks and thick with bog growths. Nearly a mile back in the dismal region a rounded dome, formed by sturdy hardwoods, cut the flat sky-line and marked a low hill. He studied the terrain ahead carefully. His horse was badly fagged for want of rest and pasturage. He, himself, was worn by lack of sleep and food. Behind him were the Creeks, urged on by the ire of their emperor. And he had no doubt that the Cherokees were blocking every path ahead.

Leading his horse, he skirted the edge of the swamp until he found a faint trail where hunters had penetrated in search of wild fowl. Taking his horse by the bridle, he encouraged the weary animal to follow him among the quaking morasses. The path was narrow and barely to be discerned and wound among many death-traps. More than once the borderer passed over only to have the horse flounder deep in the slime. Once under way, however, there was no turning back. He must pass on even if forced to abandon the horse. And King, as the emperor had named him, had grown to trust his new master, and Chucky Jack was not one to leave a friend.

"I'll stick by you, old fellow, as long as you can keep above the muck," he promised after extricating the frightened animal from an especially bad bit.

The steaming vegetation masked them from the view of any standing on the edge of the swamp, but if it had not been at the beginning of dusk the occasional flight of startled water-fowl must have betrayed them. As the light faded Sevier renewed his efforts, scarcely pausing to pick and choose. He must reach the low hill before the night blinded him. The last quarter of a mile was a desperate plunge. Several times he believed the horse was lost and pulled his pistol to give a clean death, when the intelligent animal by a super-effort won the right to live.

When he felt firm ground under his soaked moccasins he had no thought of Creek or Cherokee and threw himself down to rest. The horse gladly shifted for himself and found the pasturage rank and rich. Some time during the night Sevier groped his way up the slope and cut boughs and indulged in the luxury of a bed. But he did this as one in a dream and had scant recollection of it when he awoke in the morning.

With the new sun to warm him he worked the stiffness out of his joints and succeeded in knocking over a water-fowl with a stick. Selecting some dry sticks that would give a minimum of smoke, he lighted a tiny fire inside a dense clump of swamp-cedar and ate his first full meal since leaving Little Talassee. He saw that the food problem would cause him no worry; the swamp was carpeted by game birds. Water remained to be found.

Hunting up his horse, he followed his trail to a spring. With thirst and hunger satisfied he proceeded to examine the low hill, or knoll, and as he had expected discovered it was surrounded by the swamp. Toward the north, however, the signs indicated an easier escape than that afforded by the route he had taken in gaining his refuge. He could see occasional groups of deciduous trees that demanded a stout soil.

Ascending to the top of the knoll, he climbed an oak and obtained a wider survey of the country. In the east the lowlands met the sky-line. The extent of the swamp to the south, his back track, was much less but so hazardous to contemplate that he wondered how he ever managed to cross it with the horse. The Great War-Path, skirted the swamp on the west, and the solid forest wall in that direction was quite close, not more than half a mile away, but was barred by open expanses of water.

The path to the north was the way out. Now that he possessed a high coign of vantage he could trace the course most desirable to follow. For many minutes he examined the country, jotting down in his mind certain landmarks to go by.

A smudge of smoke in the southwest held his gaze, one of the ominous pillars that had followed him for three days. Another column, directly south, was crawling high above the forest crown. A third in the east marked the long line established by the Creeks. As he was about to descend something vague and somber in the north caught and held his gaze. Now it took shape and ballooned upward, opening like the petals of a black flower. The Cherokees were signaling to the Creeks that they, too, were on guard and waiting for their old foe to be driven into their arms.

"The trap is well set," mused Chucky Jack.

As he slid down from his perch his attention was attracted by the action of the myriads of water-fowl in the north. They began rising in fan-like formations at the very edge of the swamp; nor did they circle about and return to their feeding-grounds, but flew some distance to the east before descending. He waited and after a time a second flock, much nearer his refuge, took wing and whirred sway.

"They're coming," he mumbled, beginning to locate the probable path of the advancing enemy.

Dropping to the ground, he hastened to the foot of the knoll and caught King and led him into a thicket and secured him. Then with his rifle ready he stole to the shore of his little "island" and ensconced himself in a thicket of willows. He believed he had been there nearly an hour when directly in front of his position and within a few rods of firm land he observed a violent agitation among the bushes and caught the sound of a guttural voice raised in alarm.

Sevier crept from under the willows.

"Awi-Usdi! *Higinalii?*"

There was but one voice and it was calling on the Little Deer and asking if the super-spirit were not a friend. Sevier struck into the bog and again heard the frenzied voice crying:

"Little Deer! You are my friend?"

Leaping from rotting stump to decaying log, the borderer found himself committed to a precarious pathway. Often his foot found a transient resting-place only to leave black water behind as it was lifted. Sluggish snakes were disturbed by his passing and swam across slimy pools.

"Awi-Usdi!" Now the voice was filled with despair.

Springing to a long tree-trunk, inches deep in its pile of vivid green mold, Sevier ran to the end and parted the bushes. For a moment he was astounded by the spectacle he beheld. An Indian face was floating on the water, the painted features registering all the horrible anticipation of a hideous death.

PLACING his rifle one side, Sevier maneuvered gingerly until he could reach down and grasp the scalplock. Although he could lift the head a trifle and easily drew the submerged body close to the log, he was unable to lift the man from the slime.

"What's holding you down?" he demanded as a brown arm came from the dark water and clutched frenziedly at his wrist.

"Awi-Usdi heard my prayer! He sent you!" gasped the Indian.

"What's holding you down?" angrily demanded Sevier.

"My feet are caught in the roots of a water-soaked stump," groaned the warrior.

"Let go my wrist. I'll get you out if you do as I say."

Staring up into the bronzed face with a strange light in his eyes, the Indian released his hold, whereat Sevier dropped in a sitting posture on the end of the log and extended a foot before the imprisoned savage could sink. The hand caught the foot, and as hope brought intelligence the warrior did not make the mistake of pulling his rescuer into the death-trap. Supporting him with his foot, the borderer gathered the tops of several bushes into a bunch and forced them down until the Indian could grasp then.

"Now don't waste your strength," quietly commanded Sevier as he slipped off his shirt and bent down a small sapling which he held with his left hand. "You have an ax in your belt?"

The Indian nodded vigorously.

Supporting himself by the sapling, Sevier grimaced and dropped into the slime beside the Indian. He had no trouble in securing the ax, but he grunted loudly in disgust as he shifted his hold on the bowed sapling and allowed his body to sink beneath the stagnant water. He remained long enough to locate one of the imprisoned feet, then pulled himself above the filthy surface. Filling his lungs, he drew the ax from his belt and again descended. He worked cautiously to avoid chopping the foot and after delivering three or four blows was compelled to rise again.

For thirty minutes he repeated the maneuver, scoring nothing on some trips down, feeling the blade bite deep into the tenacious root at other times. At last the Indian gave a yelp of joy and kicked one foot free. The release of the other foot was quickly effected as the Indian managed to use the liberated member as a lever.

As the two bedraggled men sat on the log, puffing for breath and staring at each other, Sevier smiled and greeted—

"Jumper of the Deer clan, how did you do a thing like that?"

The Jumper wiped the muck from his face and in a weak voice explained:

"As Tsan-usdi knows, I shot at a wolf. It was bad medicine. It made me jump among the roots, thinking the stump was stout and strong. When my feet hit the roots they caught round my ankles like serpents and the stump sank. Kanati, the Lucky Hunter, is still angry because I shot at his watch-dog."

"But I came and pulled you out. Kanati must be over his anger," soothed Sevier.

"The Little Deer sent you when I prayed," said the Jumper.

"The Little Deer will help no man who is being punished by the Lucky Hunter. The bad medicine has worked itself weak. Kanati forgives you. The Little Deer forgives you. Has the little girl got her new tooth yet?"

The Jumper's doleful features lighted up. Hope gleamed in his small eyes, and his strong chest expanded as he began to feel himself a warrior once more, a man of the Deer, unafraid because the gods were smiling. The reference to his child caused him to fairly beam with gratitude.

"She looks many times in the glass Tsan-usdi gave her. She know it will bring a big, strong tooth. Ah! It is good to know the Lucky Hunter is no longer angry."

"Then suppose we get to dry land and clean up," Sevier suggested, taking his rifle and rising. "And why did the Jumper come out here alone?"

"I was sent to kill a bad white man."

"But I am the only white man here."

"I was told a bad white man was between our warriors and the smoke signals of the Creeks. I saw birds flying away when the sun went down yesterday. I believed the bad white was here. I waited till sunrise and came. I found—my friend."

Sevier led the way to the spring where they cleaned themselves and the borderer's garments. This done Sevier inquired—

"Where is Old Tassel?"

"At Turkey Town."

"I thought he was at Great Hiwassee. Have the Cherokees caught a white man called Jackson?"

The Jumper shook his head, saying:

"Creek runners came and our warriors went out; but he must be very cunning. He was not seen. His trail was not found."

This was the best of news for Sevier. With Jackson beyond the barrier and speeding on to the settlements there was a chance he might raise the riflemen and sweep down on Hajason's stronghold in time to prevent the departure of the Tonpits for Little Talassee.

"Have you seen Red Hajason?"

"He got fresh horses at Turkey Town and rode fast for his home three days ago," the Jumper replied.

This news was not so pleasant.

"Where is John Watts?"

The Jumper waved a hand toward the line of smoke signals in the north.

"Waiting to catch me?"

The Indian nodded.

"What does Old Tassel do at Turkey Town?"

The Jumper hesitated, loyalty to his people vieing with gratitude to his rescuer.

"The shamans perform the sacred rites very soon," he slowly retorted.

"For going to war?" sharply demanded Sevier, his gaze contracting.

"They have looked in the great crystal and found war floating in it."

"When did they go to water?"

"They do not begin the rites till two days from now."

Sevier leaped to his feet and glared eagerly toward the north. Wheeling about, he caught the Jumper by the arm and said—

"Little Brother, you owe me a life."

"Take it!" proudly answered the Jumper, holding out his war-ax.

"You shall pay me another way. I must

give a talk to Old Tassel before the Cherokees go to water. You must take me through John Watts' Chickamaugas. You must take me to Turkey Town unseen. You shall leave me near the town and no one shall know you brought me."

"I can do that, Tsan-usdi," quietly agreed the Jumper.

Sevier's face grew troubled.

"It will be hard to see Old Tassel alone. Watts' Chickamaugas will go there to perform the rites."

"The Chickamaugas went to water before you reached the Creek country."

"Good! I remember Major Hubbard said that back in Jonesboro, only he's always hearing of war-parties to excuse his killings." Then to himself, "——those hostiles. They've been on the red path for years. They don't count if the rest of the nation can be held back."

"If we are to reach Turkey Town in time we must travel all night. We must cross that before dark." And with a shiver the Jumper pointed north across the traps of the slime-covered swamp.

"It shall be done. I must take my horse out."

"Then Little John's horse must grow wings like *awahili*, the war-eagle."

Sevier replied:

"But I brought him in here, and from the south. The trail to the north is not so bad."

"Little John's medicine is very strong," conceded the Jumper.

* * *

MOVING by night with the stealth of fantoms, with the Jumper leading the way; following little-traveled side-paths, sometimes doubling back, often making wide detours to avoid the Cherokees hastening south to be in at the killing of the white man, the two edged their way toward Turkey Town. The first day they covered but a short distance, satisfied to work to the east and taking time to rest; for it was the Jumper's plan to make a dash round the left of the Cherokee line and cover the distance with a rush during the last twenty-four hours of grace.

The second night they made notable progress, escaping detection by inches when they stole between two large groups of warriors. With the morning sun they found themselves above the smoke signals. They had passed through the barrier and would now have to guard against stragglers only. Sevier was impatient to make an open ride for it, as he feared he might be too late. Did he arrive after the warriors had gone to water Old Tassel would consider himself hopelessly committed to a program of war and, being surrounded by men of the belligerent lower towns, he would be too weak to resist the pressure.

The Jumper insisted, however:

"They do not begin the rites until tomorrow. The ceremony takes four days. We must move cunningly until dark. If I am seen by Watts' Chickamaugas——"

"You shall not be seen. We will move cunningly," agreed Sevier.

CHAPTER XI

SEVIER OFFERS THE RED AX

OLD TASSEL wished he had remained at the Little Tennessee towns instead of coming to the country dominated by the war-spirit of the Chickamaugas. In particular did he regret his visit to Turkey Town, where messages from McGillivray poured in upon him and where he could not hide from the persuasive tongue of John Watts. As he was fond of reminding those who met him in council, he was an old man.

When the pressure of the war-faction threatened to become irresistible he could only console himself with thinking that war might not come in his day. Now, here in Turkey Town, even this sorry consolation was denied him. Pacifist and diplomat, he had been overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of Watts and the insistence of Dragging Canoe.

In seeking to temporize he had drifted unconsciously with the tide. Like one helpless in a dream-drama he now found himself in the council-house about to listen to the formal speeches which preceded the sacred rites of getting the eagle's feathers, the shamans' recital of the formula for those about to take the war-path, the going to water and the chewing of the charmed root. Even now he would have entered a protest and asked time to reconsider, but the Chickamauga chiefs had so cunningly hurried him along he found himself accepted as a war votary.

Watts felt so secure that this day would see Cherokee and Creek enrolled in a common cause he did not hesitate to return to his warriors, who were waiting to pounce upon Sevier. The borderer's escape from McGillivray's hands would soon take on a tinge of the supernatural if the man were not caught. The runners, who had brought the news and the emperor's request for cooperation, told of the slaughtered dogs. This feat alone was bound to make a tremendous sensation throughout the nation and redound mightily to Sevier's reputation unless he were run down immediately.

There was no doubt in either Cherokee or Creek minds as to Sevier's hiding-place. It had to be in the narrow strip of territory between the two lines of smokes. Even had Watts felt uneasy to leave Old Tassel's side the necessity of capturing Chucky Jack would have called him away. Already one refugee from the Creek country had passed the Cherokee lines—Kirk Jackson. The young Virginian's successful flight escaped being a disgrace to the Cherokee Nation because he had penetrated deep into the country before the runners arrived with the news.

Warriors had been sent after him and there was a chance he might be overtaken before he could reach the French Broad. But there would be no excuse if Chucky Jack, prize of all prizes, slipped through the Cherokees' hands. Thus, despite his inclination to remain at the village until Old Tassel was irrevocably crowded into the war-pact, Chief Watts was compelled to rejoin his lynx-eyed warriors. And Old Tassel sat disconsolate and heavy-hearted among the hot-bloods.

There were staid and sophisticated head men in Old Tassel's train who would be pleased to see the red ax buried. These lived in the Eastern towns and had mingled with the whites and had begun to realize the irresistible momentum of the tide sweeping down over the Alleghanies. Old Tassel knew he could count on his followers, but he had permitted John Watts to believe he would consent to war, and he feared the scorn of the fighting chief and his men.

Now that he knew he was being carried along with the red tide and was to be dashed against the Western settlements he sought surcease from worry by whipping himself into a rage. God knows he had had much to bitterly complain of. But despite the injustices worked him he could not establish a lasting anger. His attempt to cultivate a blood-lust failed. He had held to the white trail too long. Even in these great moments of regret he recalled certain victories he had won by guile and cunning, or fair dealing, when never an ax was reddened with blood.

The long benches were full and the majority of those present were flushed with thoughts of conquest. Theoretically they could not fail. Old Tassel was an Indian and not to be put out of countenance by the death of white folks. It was the ever present fear of disaster to his people that worried him. Even the most perfect of theories may end in alarming facts. And there was the rub. He could not be sure the Creeks would do all they boasted. If a single link in the chain broke, the chain would fly to pieces. Then it would be Old Tassel's domain that would first feel the vengeance of Chucky Jack and his horsemen.

Old Tassel cast a mournful glance over the assemblage and rose and said:

"I am an old man. My path is very steep and slippery. Now it leads me to this council where war or peace is to be decided."

He paused and glanced furtively about. With the exception of his own personal following this ambiguous announcement was received with indignant glances. Thrown into something of a panic he hastily added—

"I believe most of the men here are for war."

A loud chorus of affirmatives accented the truth of this statement.

With a poorly suppressed sigh Old Tassel continued—

"Is there any one here who has a talk for us?"

Up sprang one of Dragging Canoe's leading warriors, who began:

"I have a talk for the Cherokee Nation. It is a very old talk. It is as old as the first war-wampum. So long as we raised the ax and gave blow for blow, we were respected by the whites. Since we have put down white paths we have been crowded from our own trails and thrown into the briars and on the rocks, and the white men have filled those trails. In the old days we suffered, for we had bows and arrows against guns. Today it is not so. Spain, through the Creek Nation, will supply us with many guns and much powder. Already she has given us much.

"We will not have to run from the white

man's gun or dodge his bullets to get within arrow-shot. We are men. This is our country and we will hold it. There was a time when our land reached to the Ohio and the Great Kanawha and the Catawba, and to the west as far as our young men cared to hunt. Now we do not touch the Cumberland, except on its upper waters, while the French Broad holds us back if we go toward the rising sun.

"Brothers, we are like an old man, once tall and good to look upon, but now bent and withered. There is but one medicine that will make us young and strong and straight. It is a red medicine—the blood of the whites. The all-powerful Red Spirits of the East do not love those who give up their lands without a fight. I speak with the voice of the five lower towns. I speak for war, war, war!"

The speaker's fervor exploded whatever restraint his hearers had been practising, and in a frenzy of martial emotion brawny arms waved axes and many voices thundered:

"War! War! War!"

Even Old Tassel's eyes gleamed with savagery, suggesting new fires blooming through dead ashes. Then returned the old killing doubt: Could the white man be driven out? His gaze once more became dull and lifeless; and more for the sake of restoring a formal atmosphere to the council than because he wished to prolong the sitting he asked—

"Is there any one else who brings a talk to us before we follow the shamans?"

There was a bustling about at the entrance and a swirl of confusion as a man heavily blanketed unceremoniously pushed his way into the room and stood before the chief. Throwing back the blanket from his head and figure, he addressed Old Tassel, saying—

"I bring you a talk, Utsidsata."

"Tsan-usdi!" croaked Old Tassel, his jaw dropping in amazement.

THE assemblage, stunned to silence at beholding the man their redoubtable chief and the Creeks were seeking, glared incredulously. Then broke forth a storm of guttural execrations, and brown hands stretched forward to grasp the impudent intruder. Even in their rage, however, all remembered the kind of man Chucky Jack was. His daring to venture into the council while being hunted by the fighting-men of the two nations was a mighty check to homicidal impulses. And no hand touched him.

"Yes, it is Little John who brings the talk. Little John, who lives on the Nanatlugunyi—'the spruce-tree place'—once an ancient home of the Cherokees. I am here with my talk, even as I promised you at Great Hiwassee that I would come. Did Little John ever give his word to Old Tassel, or to any of his people, and then take it back?"

He paused for rhetorical effect, and the aged chief began to feel the influence of his audacious presence. Swinging about and pointing his extended hand at the astounded and wrathful faces, he defied:

"Did I not say I would return and give a talk to Utsidsata—'Corn-Tassel'—called Old Tassel by the white men? Then why are the Cherokees surprized to see me? Have I ever broken my word? Then why are hands clawing near my back as if a panther was near?"

Facing the chief again, he rapidly continued:

"I have always kept my word with you. Who else of those you count as friends have done the same? Is he a Creek? Does McGillivray always keep his word? Or does he first build for McGillivray and ask you to help him, and then tell you he is too tired to help you build, but some other time. *Hayi!*"

"My men want war, Little John, for the wrongs the white men have done them," weakly retorted Old Tassel, still scarcely able to believe Chucky Jack had slipped through so many fingers.

"Your men shall have war, Utsidsata. Men shall have the thing they crave; but let them beware lest the thing they seek does not bring death to them."

"Ha! The white man is a fool to talk of Cherokees dying when he stands alone with his enemies in the war-council at Turkey Town," passionately cried the orator from the lower towns.

Sevier turned on him and extended a knife, handle first, and challenged:

"So, Little John is a fool to say what he does, to speak of death? Here is a sharp knife; here is my heart. Use the knife; kill my heart. But remember this, and all here remember it—there is one now who is rallying the riflemen of the Watauga.

Before my blood can dry they will be riding a hundred miles deep into your country and will be burning your towns and corn and driving your people into the mountains, even as they have done before when you shed the white man's blood."

Abashed the warrior refused the knife. Old Tassel cried—

"Who calls the riflemen together when Little John is in Turkey Town?"

"The man called Jackson, who was held a prisoner of the Creeks in McGillivray's own town until I unfastened the door and told him to go. Did the Creeks and their dogs stop him? Could the renegade Cherokees under John Watts stop him? He laughs at you and carries my word to the riflemen. My word is this: Unless I cross the French Broad on a certain day the men of the Holston, of the Nolichucky, the Broad and the Watauga, are to enter the Cherokee Nation, killing and burning. For if I do not come it will be known that Old Tassel has broken faith, doing me harm after asking me to a council on my return from the Creeks."

The warriors glanced uneasily at each other and refused to meet the sharp gaze of the white man. Little John was once more establishing his influence. McGillivray was considered to be a mighty war-leader; yet he had been unable to hold Little John or Little John's friend. If the Emperor of the Creeks could not hold two of the borderers prisoners in his own village, what guarantee did the Cherokees have he could aid them in withstanding the attack of some three thousand riflemen?

Old Tassel, greatly alarmed at the prospect of having the northern and eastern towns destroyed, hastily insisted:

"McGillivray does not make war for the Cherokees. It is for the Cherokees to say whether they will have war or peace. The Creeks live far from the western settlements. They talk like children at times. This council has not voted for war."

"Not yet voted for war?" scornfully replied Little John. "Then take this talk from me and have done with talking. You can have war. I am not here begging for peace. I am tired trying to remain friendly with the Cherokees. Take your vote and go to water; then chew your sacred root and see if the medicine can stop our bullets. At Great Hiwassee I gave you a friendly talk and asked you to a grand council. And before doing that I sent a talk to you by Tall Runner—a peace talk.

"Now I will give you no more peace talks; for you do not like them. You want war. These young warriors from the lower towns want war. You can always have what you want if your medicine is strong. As I stood at the door I heard this warrior shouting for war."

And he turned to Dragging Canoe's orator and snatched the ax from the nonplussed warrior's belt. With his knife he slashed his own forearm and allowed the blood to drop on the head of the ax.

Before the stupefied circle could more than draw a breath he waved the gory ax above his head and threw it at the feet of Old Tassel, defying—

"You, who want red war, pick up that red ax!"

Old Tassel drew back as if it were a deadly serpent. Wheeling on the owner of the ax, Sevier invited:

"You pick it up for him. He is old and his bones are lame. You are young and strong. You love war. Yours is the voice that raises the red war-whoop. It is your ax and my blood is on it. You pick it up!"

The startled warrior glared from the chief to the borderer, then dropped his gaze and folded his blanket about him and drew back.

"Ho! Dragging Canoe's brave cries for the white man's blood but will not take back his own ax when there is white blood upon it!" jeered Sevier, spurning the weapon with his foot. "Is there any one from the lower towns who wants to pick up the ax? Remember, the Creeks will help you—the Creeks who could not hold two white men prisoners. What Chickamauga wants it? I call on the men from Running Water, from Nickajack, from Long Island, from Crow Town, from Lookout Mountain town. Who wants the red ax?"

Old Tassel scrambled to his feet and in a low voice announced:

"Red axes have no place in a peace council. Go back to the Nolichucky, Little John, and tell your riflemen to put away their guns. The Cherokees do not go to water or lay down a red path. I am an old man. My path is steep and slippery. I will not make it red with blood. You gave me a promise at Great Hiwassee. I gave you one. I said if you came to me after going to McGillivray I would meet you in a grand council on the French Broad. I will do so. Go to your home, Little John, before your men ride into my country. You shall find nothing but white trails between here and the French Broad. I have said it."

"*Ku!* But there is something else. How can I hold my riflemen back when Creek warriors are crossing your land to strike us in the head? If you are honest, see to it the Creeks are turned back home. For my riflemen will believe you have given them a bloody belt if they see them on your land. Ride! Ride fast, Utsidsata! Reach the Tellico before I reach the Nolichucky, so my men may know your talk is straight when you say you will come to a grand council. Send out warriors to drive McGillivray's Creeks where they belong—back on the Coosa. I will not answer for peace unless this is done."

LEAVING the village, followed by the black scowls of the fighting-men, Sevier lost no time in striking for the Hiwassee River a hundred miles away. He left the warriors in the council-house inert and speechless under the impress of his bold speech. His personal magnetism had once more stood him in good stead, and did Old Tassel ride for the Tellico before Watts returned to Turkey Town there was every likelihood of the Cherokees refusing to complete their war-pact with the Creeks. A few miles from the village, as he galloped along the eastern bank of the upper Coosa, he found the Jumper waiting for him.

"Brother of the Deer, you have a talk for me," he saluted as he drew abreast of the silent figure.

"The man called Red Hajason is ahead with Creek warriors. They will turn east at Fighting Town and make for the head of the Hiwassee, where Red Hajason has his village."

"Tsan-usdi thanks you. Old Tassel votes for peace. Go to him and say that Little John demands the Creeks with Hajason be turned back home."

The Jumper led a horse from the bush and scampered down the trail while Sevier resumed his journey. The borderer knew he would not be molested in the immediate vicinity of Turkey Town, but so soon as he encountered warriors who had not learned of his last talk with the old chief there was likely to be trouble. For it was accepted as a fact throughout the nation that Old Tassel had been won over by the war-faction. So Sevier held to the trail for a scant score of miles and then turned aside into the forest, to proceed by stealth until the news of Old Tassel's latest decision could be carried to the northern towns.

Behind him the Cherokee smokes still answered the Creek signals, the watchers confident that Chucky Jack was bottled up between the lines. The result of the peace talk had not yet been conveyed to Chief Watts. And Chucky Jack smiled as he pictured McGillivray's rage on being told Old Tassel was opposed to the Creek alliance.

"If he sticks to his word and keeps on being opposed!" Servier murmured as he picked his way beneath the ancient trees. "Can Watts win the chief back again? Not if fear for his towns on the Little Tennessee sends him home without meeting Watts. If he rides for home he will sweep the country with the news that the ax is buried. I'll save time by waiting a bit to make sure. If he stays at Turkey Town, then Watts will make him change his mind."

That night he made his camp on the side of a hill overlooking the trail to the north. Before sunrise he was up and anxiously scanning the worn ribbon of a path where it debouched into an opening. Either Old Tassel and his followers would pass within a few hours or had succumbed to the insistence of the Chickamaugas. If the old chief was still for peace he must be within a few hours' ride of the borderer and would press on hotly to avoid being overtaken by Watts.

With his gaze fixed on the opening Sevier saw the mist-ghosts rise and draw their shrouds about them and vanish before the level rays of the sun. For two hours the open trail was purified by sunlight; then a horseman, riding hard, broke from the woods. Behind him came others, until the borderer counted nearly two score, and in the middle of the galloping line rode Old Tassel.

"I've won!" softly exclaimed Sevier, sinking limply back on the moss. "Old Tassel hurries to the Tellico. That means peace! Now, McGillivray of the Creeks, go ahead with your secret treaty with Spain, and be —— to you!"

In great elation Sevier shot a turkey and ate his breakfast and leisurely followed on after the warriors. The cry of peace would radiate on all sides of their advance. Twice during the day he saw Cherokees. One party he avoided. The second was afoot and hidden by a twist in the trail and he rode into them unexpectedly. Instead of seeking to force him to pass between them, they drew to one side.

Yet he halted and sternly asked—

"Is it peace?"

They presented empty hands, and an elderly warrior gravely answered—

"It is peace, Tsan-usdi."

He galloped on. Could he but intercept the Tonpits he would set back McGillivray's plans for two years; and during that period of grace he was confident his riflemen would increase in numbers until a show of force on Spain's part would be folly.

Toward evening, while looking about for a place to camp, he came to a point in the trail where Old Tassel's band had split into two parties. The larger had turned in an easterly direction the smaller had stuck to the main trail leading north. He deduced the reason for this division almost at once. The Jumper had told Old Tassel that Little John wanted the Creeks and Hajason turned back, and the bulk of the warriors were following the outlaw to strip him of his escort. The chief and a few men had pushed on to make the Tellico.

With a solid night's rest refreshing him and his mount Chucky Jack took after the eastbound band; for he must be near at hand when Red Hajason told the Tonpits they were free to go to Little Talassee. He knew Major Tonpit would bitterly resent any interference with his plans and would insist on going to the Emperor of the Creeks. In that event Sevier planned to use the girl as a lever and take her from her father by force if necessary. Did Jackson succeed in returning with the riflemen the task would be simple; if he failed, then Chucky Jack must depend upon his own medicine.

A day and a night and another morning, and just as he was about to light his tiny fire there came the noise of many horsemen riding carelessly. He stood at the head of his horse to prevent the animal from betraying him. First came the Creeks who had gone north with Hajason, and the borderer's heart sang in victory. Behind them, taciturn and determined, rode old Tassel's Cherokees. The Creeks were sullen and talked none with their escort. Sevier now knew that Hajason was alone, and no sooner had the Indians passed out of hearing than he was riding madly along the trail to overtake the outlaw.

Near midday a bullet clipped through foliage on his right and missed him only because of the Providential intervention of a hemlock bough. He dropped behind his horse and drove the animal to a huge oak, where he left him to slip into the woods and scout toward the source of the murderous assault. He had advanced a score of rods when the rifle barked again, this time back near the trail, showing his assailant had doubled back.

Sevier ran rapidly, sacrificing cover for speed, for he feared his unseen enemy was planning to steal his horse. As he broke into the trail and beheld his mount by the oak there came the *thud-thud* of swift hoofs ahead, and he smiled grimly at the error in his reasoning. The fellow had left his horse in the trail and was eager only to escape after his two unsuccessful attempts at murder.

The borderer spurred after him, rejoicing at the prospect of an open fight. Only once, however, did he sight his quarry. He had topped a rise and the horseman ahead was beginning the descent of a low ridge. Already the horse was hidden from view. Throwing forward his rifle and taking quick aim, Sevier fired. The man's fur hat leaped into the air. On gaining the ridge Chucky Jack found the trail to be empty.

"He can consider that a promise of what's coming," Sevier told himself as he paused to reload.

He raced on recklessly, feeling only contempt for a white man who would seek to ambush one of his own color, but he pulled his horse in sharply enough on discovering the trail of the fugitive now showed two sets of tracks. Either some one was pursuing him or had emerged from the woods to ride with him.

"They're friends. Two against one," he decided after studying the tracks carefully.

Night overtook him without his sighting the couple. This time he arranged his camp with much cunning, camping apart from his evening fire and arranging his blankets so as to resemble the muffled form of a sleeper. He fell asleep at once and slumbered peacefully until aroused by a rifle-shot.

"Daylight is when I want to meet you, my lads," he drowsily murmured before turning over and going to sleep again.

With the first light he returned to the dead camp-fire and retrieved his blanket. There was a hole through one end of it. He examined the ground and found where the intruder had stolen forward to shoot and then ran away without investigating the success of his shot. That he had retreated in haste was indicated by the broken sticks and the torn up moss.

"Never even stopped to see if he got me," murmured Sevier with a grin. "Wonder if it was Hajason or the man who joined him. Hajason seemed to have enough grit when he faced McGillivray."

His visitor had come afoot and his trail was lost once he struck into the main trail. Sevier lost some time in searching for the men's camp, then shrewdly decided he could pick them up by pressing on to the headwaters of the Hiwassee. Moving cautiously, for even a coward's lead is not to be despised in the daylight, he covered a dozen miles and was brought to keen attention by the muffled report of a rifle some distance away.

This shot was not intended for him, and the field of conjecture was very wide. Had it been followed by other shots he would have believed the riflemen were heading off Hajason and his mate. But the forest remained quiet enough and, leading his animal, he stole on. Suddenly a frantic scrambling of a heavy body in a dense growth sent him to shelter; and yet neither of the outlaws' mounts could be creating this confusion.

He stood erect, his gaze betraying his astonishment as a woman's voice close at hand shrieked the one word—

"Father!"

The anguish in her voice bespoke a deadly fear. Sevier darted toward the sound. Again the voice rang out, this time in a cry of despair, followed by a hoarse shout of triumph. And the bushes parted and a maddened horse, riderless and with blood-smears on his flank, plunged out and past the borderer.

Throwing caution to the winds, Sevier plunged ahead. A familiar voice was exclaiming:

"Run ye down, pretty bird, didn't I? Wasn't fit for ye to wipe yer leetle feet on—an' now!"

Sevier became a shadow, but the speaker obviously attributed any noise he had heard to the mad plunges of the riderless horse, for he continued:

"Hajason can play some folks double, but not me, young woman. Now ye quit that foolishness an' git up on yer pins, or it'll be the worse for ye."

Parting some cedar boughs, Sevier beheld Lon Hester. The villain was still wearing his bedraggled cock's feather and was standing beside his horse and staring evilly at the limp form of Elsie Tonpit, where she lay unconscious after being unseated by her crazed mount. The little drama was clear; the girl had escaped and Hester had pursued and shot her horse.

"—— if she ain't pretty's a picter," gloated Hester, his face growing bestial.

The girl was alive and Sevier waited. Hester continued, speaking aloud to check off certain data:

"I can't go back to Jonesboro. McGillivray might pay a ransom, an' he might string me up without even sayin' thank ye. I reckon I'll keep her for myself, seein' as nobody else 'pears to want her."

It was at this point that Sevier noiselessly stepped from cover and quietly informed—

"But I want her, Mr. Hester.

CHAPTER XII

TONPIT CHANGES HIS PLANS

"CHUCKY JACK!" Hester dully exclaimed.

"Drop your gun."

The bully's readiness to obey convinced Sevier the weapon had not been reloaded since discharged at the girl's horse. The borderer glided to the girl and kneeled at her side. She breathed. The borderer started to rise, and Hester pulled an ax from the back of his belt and hurled it. Sevier ducked and raised his rifle. The ax smashed against the barrel and knocked it from his grasp. Believing he had Chucky Jack at a great disadvantage, Hester leaped forward, his hands outstretched, his diabolical fingers crooked to claw his opponent's eyes. Like a cornered rat he knew he must fight as he had never fought before.

To save the girl from being trampled upon Sevier stepped over her body without pausing to pick up his rifle. The two crashed together within a few feet of the silent form. Still having the girl in mind, the borderer exerted all his energies to force Hester back. The bully was quick to realize that so long as there was danger of their falling on, or stepping on, the girl Sevier would fight defensively, postponing any attempt to use either of the long knives in his belt.

Sevier had not forgotten his weapons, but as Hester was unarmed he was quite willing to meet him barehanded and make him a prisoner. Hester bulked larger than the borderer and had made man-maiming a study.

He grunted in relief as Sevier clinched and made no effort to draw a knife. The bully blessed his luck for relegating the contest to the plane of sheer brutality.

"I've always hankered to git a chance at ye," he panted, clawing at Sevier's eyes.

Sevier ducked back his head and struck upward, a short-arm jolt, the heel of his palm catching the bully under the nose and eliciting a howl of pain. Fighting to spare the girl, Sevier maneuvered his antagonist back a dozen feet. Then he flashed a smile of relief into Hester's distorted face and the bully's moral fiber began to weaken. The fact that Chucky Jack had accomplished his first objective was an earnest of a second victory. Hester redoubled his ferocious efforts.

Sevier played back right willingly, his slim form giving and resisting with the supple strength of a steel spring. Hester's eyes grew a bit worried. In Jonesboro he had often told his cronies that Chucky Jack was allowed to have his own way because of his prowess as a rifleman, and that in a man-to-man contest he would soon lose his fighting reputation. In drunken confidences at the tavern he had also gone on record as asking nothing better than to be turned loose in a fight with Sevier, each man armed only with his hands.

Now that these ideal conditions were afforded him he discovered he was not making any headway. Repeatedly he essayed his *coup de maitre*, a play for the eyes, and each time he failed by the edge of a second and received terrific punishment in return. His long, pointed nails scratched the borderer's forehead and furrowed his face, but they could not extinguish the blaze in the deadly blue orbs.

He shifted his tactics and endeavored to use his feet and knees, but instantly the borderer pressed close until there was not enough room for delivering a telling kick, or for a drive of the knee.

"Any more tricks you haven't tried?" murmured Sevier, viciously plunging his knuckles into the front of the red throat.

Coughing and gasping, Hester faintly cried out a blasphemy and feared he was being mastered at his own game. He now knew Sevier could have blinded him a dozen times had he so desired. A terrible fear of the slim fighter began to smother his rage. Judging Chucky Jack by his own standards, he fully expected that when the borderer had wearied of playing with him he would destroy his sight and leave him to find a hideous death in the forest. For that was the death he had planned for Sevier, and he could not imagine a man foregoing the pleasure once he secured the advantage.

The two knives in Sevier's belt hung just back of the hips to be out of the way while riding. They were long, terrible weapons. Hester believed Sevier could have used these at the beginning of the fray and had refrained for the greater joy of blinding his foe. He could not know that Sevier had fought with his hands in order to take a prisoner, and that once the borderer was committed to this style of battle he had all he could do to protect his eyesight and dared not leave his face unprotected while he fished for a knife.

And Sevier smiled as he blocked each attempt, but he was more keenly concerned than Hester imagined. Suddenly the bully butted his head and at the same time wrenched a hand free and plunged it to the borderer's belt. Sevier bowed his head and received the blow on his forehead, the two skulls crashing together with sickening force. For a second the borderer's head swam; in the next he had struck Hester's hand to one side, but not before the bully's long fingers had gripped a knife.

"Now!" yelled Hester, stabbing joyously.

"And now!" replied Sevier, avoiding the thrust and pulling the second knife. "I like this much better."

Hester was surprized at the expression of relief on Chucky Jack's face.

"Ye was skeered of my hands?" he grunted, thrusting tentatively.

"I was afraid," confessed Sevier, stepping to one side and forcing him toward the bushes. "Just as I'm afraid of a mad-wolf's bite. But this is clean sport. I like it."

Hester believed him and wofully regretted his shift to the knives. But he grew optimistic as he observed Sevier kept darting glances about, a dangerous practise for a knife-fighter, and exulted:

"Gittin' sick, eh? Tryin' to find a chance to sneak out, eh?"

"Hardly that," corrected Sevier, scoring him in the forearm. "I had planned to take you alive. Now I've decided to kill you; and as Miss Tonpit is recovering her senses I'm just looking for a place where you can die without disturbing her."

As he spoke he thrust and slashed and drove the bully back to the fringe of bushes.

Hester's face glistened with sweat. Did he dare shift his gaze aside, he believed he would behold cowled Death waiting for him. Then there rang a long-drawn cry that caused the combatants to throw up their heads and for a moment to neglect their grim business.

"Elsie-e-e! Oh Elsie-e-e!" called the voice, and Sevier heard the girl stir behind him.

For a moment the borderer relaxed the pressure of his attack, and with a loud yell Hester leaped backward and threw his knife and jumped into the bushes. The knife, thrown blindly, landed haft first between Sevier's eyes and confused him for a second. Before he could pursue the bully the girl's name was shouted again, and the girl, now on her knees, faintly answered:

"This way, father! Come to me!"

Sevier hesitated. He could hear his antagonist crashing away in frantic flight and he knew he could easily overtake him. But close at hand Major Tonpit was loudly calling, and the girl could not be left alone. Now she was on her feet and staring at him wildly.

"Who are you with a knife in your hand?" she whispered.

He advanced and with a little scream of terror she drew back, not recognizing him because of his disordered garments, his scratched and soiled countenance.

"You've fotgotten John Sevier?" he asked.

With a glad cry she ran to him and clutched his arm and stared about in search of Hester.

"He's run away, Miss Elsie," Sevier soothed. "He won't bother you any more. And your father is coming."

"Father escaped from them!" she rejoiced, and lifting her voice she called to him.

Sevier picked up his rifle and examined the priming, then loaded Hester's gun. Securing Hester's horse he swung Elsie into the saddle and led the way back to his own mount, cautioning:

"Don't call again. I can find him. If the outlaws are following him he'll bring them down on us. Hester will set them on our trail soon enough without any help from us."

TONPIT'S voice rang out again, this time impatiently, for he had heard his daughter's voice and knew she must be safe. Motioning her to be silent, Sevier gave a soft whistle. A horse crashed through the undergrowth and Tonpit was imperiously demanding:

"Where are you, Elsie? I've been horribly frightened."

"This way, father," she softly answered. "And not so loud, dear. Those men will hear us."

"There are two of them who won't hear anything this side of the Last Trump," he hoarsely assured, spurring his mount into the trail. On catching sight of Sevier, he leveled the pistol he was holding and snapped it.

"Father!" groaned the horrified girl. "It's Mr. Sevier, father."

Tonpit leaned forward over his horse's neck and blinked at the borderer.

"Then what the devil is he doing here with that scum?" he fiercely demanded.

"He just saved me from Hester. Mr. Sevier is my friend," she gently reminded.

"Friend? We shall see," was the grim reply. "If he is our friend he will guide us to the trail that runs south."

"You ride where?" asked Sevier, mounting his horse.

"To the Coosa River. And time is precious," snapped Tonpit.

"You've been held prisoners by Red Hajason?" Sevier asked.

Tonpit nodded gloomily; then with a streak of suspicion he asked:

"How did you know about it? Has my daughter told you?"

"I've had no time to talk with your daughter," Sevier coldly replied. "I found her unconscious from a fall from her horse. Hester was with her, and I was on the point of killing him when your call disturbed the balance of battle long enough for him to escape."

"Then I'm —— sorry I called," growled Tonpit. "But Hester said you killed the Indian, who was to be my guide."

"He lied," Sevier calmly retorted.

"He came in the Indian's place," continued Tonpit. "But he took us to Red Hajason's camp instead of to the Coosa. We've been held prisoners ever since. Then Hajason went away, and I got two horses and Elsie and I rode for it, followed by the band. We threw them off the trail yesterday, but when we broke camp this morning several of them jumped us. She rode ahead while I fought them off. I shot two and got away, but, lost her. That's all there is to tell, except I'd give a thousand pounds to know what Hajason is up to."

"I can tell you for nothing," said Sevier. "He went to McGillivray of the Creeks to bargain for your release. On returning he met Hester. They tried to kill me and then separated when I chased them. Hester ran into Elsie and shot her horse. Hajason by this time has connected with the gang. McGillivray offered Hajason two thousand pounds, gold, for the release of you and your daughter."

"Ha!" cried Tonpit, his eyes flashing. "Good friend! True friend! And by escaping we save him his gold. But how come you to know all this?" And the habitual air of suspicion lowered from his gaze.

"I was in Little Talassee—his prisoner. I've just escaped. Polcher was there——"

"Escaped from the Emperor of the Creeks!" exclaimed Tonpit, his tone implying an inclination to disbelieve the statement. Then hurriedly, "And Polcher? He helped to arrange for my ransom? He's true-blue! He's humble, but he has served me faithfully. I shall reward him."

"He's—he has been rewarded, after a fashion," said Sevier. "Major Tonpit, you might as well face the truth now as later. McGillivray's game is played out. Old Tassel votes for peace. The Cherokees will not join with the Creeks. Without them McGillivray's pledge of twenty thousand warriors is just ten thousand warriors short."

"I don't believe it, sir!" Tonpit passionately cried. "McGillivray of the Creeks will be the savior of the Western settlements! He has done me the honor of picking me—" He halted and frowned heavily at Sevier's battered face. "I was forgetting that you're on the other side; that you prefer bloodshed and bowing the knee to Pennsylvania and Massachusetts to a glorious freedom."

"Just now I prefer clearing out from here before Hester can bring the outlaws down upon us," dryly retorted Sevier, pricking his horse up the trail.

Tonpit wheeled his mount and would have struck to the south had not Sevier caught the bridle of the girl's horse and led it beside his own.

"Here, here, John Sevier!" Tonpit remonstrated, spurring after him. "We ride to the Coosa."

"You would be overtaken before sunset," coolly replied Sevier, increasing the pace. "By this time Red Hajason is in command of his men. He knows you would ride in that direction."

"Where I ride is my business!" angrily cried Tonpit, now on the other side of his daughter and attempting to wrest the bridle form Chucky Jack's grasp.

"But, father, Mr. Sevier knows best," pleaded the girl.

"Is it a girl's place to teach her father wisdom?" harshly rebuked Tonpit.

"You can't ride south," quietly informed Sevier. "Your cause is lost, and I'll be shot if you lose your daughter into the bargain."

"Release that bridle!" thundered Tonpit, now beside himself with rage.

And he raised the pistol. The girl threw herself forward to block the bullet, and cried:

"Shame, father! After what he has done for us! Better shoot me than him."

Tonpit sagged back aghast. A second more and he had pulled the trigger, for his mind was curiously warped and his imprisonment had rendered him irresponsible. To relieve the scene of its tragic atmosphere, Sevier advised:

"You'd better load that pistol. We may

need it soon. You've tried once to shoot me with it."

Tonpit's cold face flushed and he mumbled:

"I was hasty. I apologize; I will reload it. Then my daughter and I will ride south."

"The trail south is open to you, but the girl rides north," Sevier calmly informed.

Tonpit's eyes glowed wolfishly and without a word he began reloading the weapon. The girl knew the climax would come the moment he finished his task, and to Sevier she pleaded:

"You mean well, but after all my place is by my father's side. I thank you for what you've done. Now let us part good friends."

"Your place is not in Little Talassee, where they plot to cut up the Union," was the firm response. "Your place is where Americanism thrives, in the settlements, or in the cities over the mountains. Never where McGillivray plots with Spain."

"Mr. Sevier, I will shoot you if you persist in your interference," Tonpit announced.

"Then you will be a murderer and your daughter will refuse to ride with you," cheerfully countered Sevier. "If my death will restore the young woman to the American settlements, why, I shall not have died for nothing."

"Put up your pistol, father," commanded the girl. "If you do Mr. Sevier any harm I shall ride north alone."

Tonpit's face became ghastly as he heard her ultimatum and caught a reflection of his own stubborn will in her young face.

"You've tricked me, Sevier," he whispered. "But there'll be a reckoning between us——"

"Hush!" cried the girl, placing her fingers against his lips.

Sevier tilted his head and meeting her questioning gaze nodded gravely.

"What is it now?" growled Tonpit.

"They're after us, the whole gang," informed Sevier. "Had you started south you would be prisoners by this time. They're on our trail and we've no time for talk. Keep at my heels."

He spurred ahead with the girl and Tonpit raced after him. Loud yells from behind advertised their discovery by the outlaws. Rifles were fired, but without aim, as none of the lead came near them. Sevier twisted his head and motioned for Tonpit to ride beside him while the girl led the way. As Tonpit drew up the borderer informed:

"We can't outride them. Your girl is played out. A few miles ahead there is a cave near the trail where we can hide. Once there one of us can stand them off until the other gets help."

"Get help? Who is there to help us in this cursed country?" groaned Tonpit.

"The Cherokees," said Sevier. "Because of my talk with Old Tassel they will send men. Did McGillivray have his way the Cherokees would now be at war with the settlements and be among those hunting us. You've lost a chance to be Spain's governor in the new world, but we'll save the girl."

"Let us get to the cave," gritted Tonpit.

He dropped back and Sevier rode beside the girl. Their pursuers came fast and furious and the borderer knew they were gaining. The trail with its twistings and its banks of forest growth prevented the pursuers and the fugitives from glimpsing each other. Pointing ahead to a lightning-shattered oak, Sevier directed:

"When we reach it you and Miss Elsie must dismount and make back into the woods till you come to a high ledge. The cave is half-way up the ledge and can't be seen from below. Better hide among the rocks and wait for me to lead you."

As they reached the fallen tree Tonpit and Elsie dismounted and plunged into the woods. Sevier gathered up the bridles and the three horses swept on. For half a mile Sevier laid down the telltale trail, then took to a ribbon of exposed rock and turned at right-angles to the traveled path, his course paralleling that taken by the Tonpits.

A quarter of a mile of cautious advance brought him to the foot of the ridge, and he turned south and soon came to the ledge. As he leaped to the ground and led the horses deep among the rocks and brush Elsie Tonpit's face peered from behind a bolder. In another moment he was leading father and daughter to the hiding-place.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SENTENCE OF THE WILDERNESS

ALTHOUGH styled a cave by Sevier the hiding-place in the ledge was only a rock recess, caused by the undercutting of surface waters. In this pocket the borderer left the Tonpits while he went for assistance. He was surprized on scouting toward the trail to hear the voices of the outlaws raised in loud discussion. He had taken it for granted that Hajason's men would not observe the abrupt ending of the signs left by the three horses and would continue their pursuit for some distance beyond the ledge.

"I tell ye this is the girl's hoss. I plugged him to stop the girl. That skunk of a Sevier can't make fast time carryin' her on his saddle. Old Tonpit's nag must be 'bout blowed," bawled Hester's voice.

"My breed tracker says there was three hosses ahead," boomed Hajason's deep bass. "He didn't have to see 'em to know that. If ye fools hadn't rammed ahead of him an' wiped out the signs he could 'a' told where they swung off the path. All we know now is that they turned off somewheres atween here an' where we stopped, or 'bout half a mile ahead. We'll have to scatter an' search both sides of the path."

"This hoss with his flank ripped open is the girl's nag, I'm tellin' ye," persisted Hester. "If Sevier didn't ride double then they must 'a' took my hoss. If that's the case an' he's within hearin', I reckon I can wipe out the need of searchin' both sides of the path. My animal is trained to prick up his ears when he hears this."

Sevier darted back toward the three horses hidden among the rocks, but he had scarcely started when the bully's shrill whistle rang out. Before he could cover quarter of the distance the whistling was repeated several times and Hester's mount came galloping through the thickets in answer to his master's call. The borderer essayed to catch the bridle, but with a snort the animal jumped aside and crashed toward the trail.

The excited cries of the outlaws, punctuated by Hester's loud oaths of admiration, greeted the arrival of the horse. Sevier's only consolation was the knowledge that although the faithful beast had answered the call he could not guide the outlaws to the ledge. And yet, a quarter of a mile even of thick forest did not afford as wide a margin of safety as Sevier would wish. The borderer realized that whatever action he was to take to safeguard the secret of the ledge must be initiated at once.

At a point where a twist in the trail hid the band from view Sevier crossed to the other side. Moving parallel to the trail, he gained a position opposite the horsemen just as Red Hajason was commanding:

"Spread out in a thin line an' beat up the woods. The hoss come from some spot near here. The trackers will go ahead an' foller the hoss's tracks. When any one sights the runaways jest give a yell an' lay low till all of us can come up. Not a word, mind ye, till ye see something."

Sevier crawled closer, until, by kneeling, he could detect the movement of a horse on the trail. Raising his rifle, he fired. The animal dropped, shot through the head. The rider, thrown violently to the ground, quickly identified himself by cursing volubly as only Red Hajason could curse.

Sevier, although deeply regretting his lead had killed the horse instead of its master, thus distracted the outlaws from their purpose of searching the woods in the vicinity of the ledge. He began falling back, slipping noiselessly from tree to tree, while Hajason yelled for his men to dismount and give chase. The men obeyed but displayed a strong inclination to keep well together. Such a daring attack could have been made by but one man, Chucky Jack, whose woodcraft was superior to that of an Indian's.

"—— ye for white-livered hounds!" roared Red Hajason. "Spread out! A hundred pounds to the man what fetches me his head!"

Stimulated by this offer and spurred on by their fear of their leader, the men lengthened the line, and Sevier knew he must give ground in earnest. He was in a peculiar predicament, for his task was increased two-fold by the appearance of Hester's horse. He must adhere to his original plan of securing assistance; the safety of the girl demanded that. Yet he must remain in contact with the gang or the men would become discouraged at their lack of success and return to investigate the east side of the trail.

To find succor under the circumstances would demand something of a miracle. Any band of Cherokees in the neighborhood would scatter and take to cover when they heard the sound of the chase. He had counted on finding a village, unsuspected by the outlaws, and by a diplomatic "talk" enlisting the aid of the warriors. The precipitate pursuit eliminated any chance of finesse. Could he play the game until nightfall he might find it possible to double back and lead the Tonpits north.

Against this maneuver bulked the obstacle of the horses and their guard left in the trail. Once the outlaws lost him they would return to their animals, arriving coincident with his return to the ledge.

"Devil of a mess!" Sevier inwardly raged as he knocked the legs from under an outlaw closing in on his right. "Held up by these scum after standing off both the Creek and the Cherokee Nations! If it wasn't for Miss Elsie I'd love to stay round these parts till there either wasn't any Chucky Jack or there wasn't any outlaws."

His shot at the man on the right brought the gang forward in a wild rush, each eager to sight the fugitive before he could reload. Sevier raced for his life until he gained enough leeway to pause and recharge his rifle. He had barely finished when a rustling behind him sent him to the ground, his gun leveled.

"*Wa-ya!*" softly called a voice.

"*Ani-waya!*" joyfully hissed Sevier, creeping forward. "Man of the Wolf clan, where are you?"

A copper-colored form rose almost at his elbow. The borderer recognized Bloody Mouth.

"Little John never knew the hunting-call of the Wolf could sound so sweet," whispered Sevier.

"Tsan-usdi is chased by dogs," growled Bloody Mouth, his eyes flaring with bloodlust. "I will stick my ax in their heads."

Drawing the warrior back as the outlaws advanced, Sevier hurriedly asked:

"Where are the Cherokees? I want warriors."

"You must travel till sundown to come up with them," was the discouraging rejoinder.

"That will not do," muttered Sevier. "Bloody Mouth will do as his brother says?"

"He will. By nightfall his wolf-call will bring many men of his clan. Then we will hunt down and break off the heads of Tsan-usdi's enemies."

"I can not wait. There is a white woman I must take north. Take my place and keep falling back. Wear my hat and hunting-shirt but do not let them see you if you can help it. If they do see you they will think you are Little John. Do not speak."

"But I can shoot?"

"Aye, and shoot to kill. Lead them far. There are many horses back on the trail. They shall all be yours."

"*Siyu!* I feel my medicine is very red," gloated Bloody Mouth, slipping on the shirt and taking the hat.

With this decoy to take his place Sevier sprinted away to pass around the north end of the outlaws' advance. Occasional shouts and much rifle-fire kept him informed as to the continued success of his deception. Bloody Mouth was retreating, and the few flittering glimpses the horse-theives caught of him convinced them they all but had Chucky Jack in their power.

A CRACKLING among the bushes near by caused Sevier to drop into a hollow and draw his knife. A man in buckskin, evil of face and panting with eagerness to work behind the fugitive and slay from ambush, passed close to the borderer. Only the safety of the Tonpits prevented him from stopping the outlaw. In another five minutes the fugitive knew he was behind the line of searchers. Between him and the trail there could be no menace except as he might encounter a straggler.

His return was unimpeded and, cautiously thrusting his head from cover, Sevier beheld two-score horses and five guards. He was surprized at this show of strength, having believed there could not be more than a score of outlaws at the most. A new and daring plan formed in his mind; to rout the guards and run off the animals would be a noble counter-stroke. Without their animals Hajason's men would feel helpless.

He carefully shifted his position, preliminary to covering the guards with his rifle and demanding their surrender, but was interrupted by a commotion in the bush above him. The guards observed it and raised their guns; then they relaxed as Red Hajason and Hester stepped into the trail and slowly walked toward the borderer's position.

"I tell ye, the major'n the woman's back where my hoss come from," persisted Hester. "To —— with Chucky Jack. Whistle yer gang back an' let's grab 'em."

Hajason smiled cynically and retorted: "D'ye s'pose I didn't have brains 'nough to know they was back there? That's why ye run into me on comin' back here. We both had the same notion, I reckon. Sevier's out of the way, bein' chased toward sundown. His goin' takes the men out of the way. It gives us a chance to git the major'n his girl an' light out. Old Tassel's ag'in war. That means Chucky Jack will have plenty of time to fetch his riflemen down on me. I've been lookin' for it for more'n two years. I'm through with this country. Me for the Creek Nation an' the money McGillivray will pay for the man an' woman. Then for New 'Leans. Game's played out on the Hiwassee. Too many —— settlers crowdin' in."

"Where do I figger in the money McGillivray pays ye?" curiously asked Hester.

"I'll give ye five hundred dollars."

"——! An' after me fetchin 'em to ye!"

"Ye fetched 'em 'cause ye couldn't handle the game yerself. It was me that risked my neck in goin' to McGillivray. Then I've got to square some of the men."

Hester laughed mockingly.

"Ye'll take these five men, mebbe. An' after ye strike the creek border they can carry in one eye all ye give 'em. Gimme a thousand an' we'll round up the Tonpits, bunch the hosses an' ride for the Coosa."

"A thousand! Ye're crazy. After Polcher dips his dirty paws in, what'll be left for me?"

"Polcher?" gasped Hester, rubbing his chin. "Huh! So he's down there. I don't reckon I care for to see Mister Polcher. He must feel nasty the way I fetched the Tonpits to ye. An' he's sure told McGillivray the trick I played. I ain't hankerin' to see McGillivray, neither. Gimme the five hundred now."

"What do I git for the five hundred?" sneered Hajason.

"I'll help round 'em up an' help run 'em off till we strike the lower towns. I've got some good friends there."

Hajason stroked his beard thoughtfully; then he promised——

"As soon as we git the man an' woman on hosses an' ready to cut an' run I'll hand over."

Hester's visage grew dark with passion, but he feared Hajason and smothered his rage and reluctantly agreed:

"Ye drive a fussy bargain. But I'll agree, providin' ye can pay me the minute we catch 'em."

Hajason tapped a bulging belt under his hunting-shirt and assured:

"I've got it with me. Don't fret any. I've been lookin' for the game to bust up an' always go loaded. It's yers once we nail 'em."

"All right," said Hester, catching a horse and mounting.

Red Hajason climbed into a saddle and ordered the guards to take the horses down the trail a mile.

"We'll save time pickin' 'em up there," he laughed.

"There'll be some pretty profits out of the nags an' the saddles," mused Hester. "S'pose I come in on that?"

"S'pose ye don't, an' save yer breath," snarled Red Hajason. "Ye're lucky I ain't found no fault for the way ye let them two slip through yer hands while I was gone. I'm a fool to give ye even five hundred."

Hester sighed and rode beside Red Hajason and remarked:

"Wal, if ye feel that way 'bout it, I reckon I won't say nothin' more. I'll jest take all ye've got."

He had pistoled his man before Sevier could guess what was coming. The borderer raised his rifle; then he lowered it as the five guards sounded a shout of rage and started for the assassin. The last Sevier saw of Hester the bully was galloping the two horses up the trail while he held Hajason's body in the saddle and unfastened the heavy money-belt.

After the guards had pounded by his place of concealment Sevier darted across the trail. The rearmost guard happened to glance back and see him. He wheeled about with a yell of warning to his mates, but the four swept on to kill Hester. The cry was answered from the woods, however, and Sevier dived into cover just as the outlaws returned from chasing Bloody Mouth.

The borderer had no idea of leading the gang to the ledge, and at once he endeavored to work north, parallel to the trail. The outlaws pressed him close. He shot one and was instantly engaged by two others. Clubbing his rifle, he knocked one senseless, whereat the second lost all stomach for the fight and fled. The delay permitted others to come up. Dropping his empty gun, he snatched up the rifles belonging to the dead man and his senseless mate and discharged both pointblank at his assailants. They fell back in confusion at this unexpected reception, and the borderer leaped into a thicket armed only with his knives.

Frantic cries from the trail, followed by a volley of rifle-fire, checked his flight and turned him back to investigate. As he emerged into the trail a horseman threw up his rifle, only to have it knocked aside by Kirk Jackson.

"John Sevier!" he yelled. "John Sevier without his shirt!"

Chucky Jack beheld his riflemen scuttling into the woods and out again in the process of running the horse-thieves to cover. On the ground were a dozen dead outlaws and two settlers. Stetson was standing beside his horse, tying a bandage about his arm by using his teeth, the process sadly weakening his emphatic sentiments concerning all "varments."

"Hester got away!" panted Sevier, throwing himself on to a horse. "He went north——"

"We came from the north. We met him," gravely informed Jackson. "We'd been here sooner, but the men formed a ring and he and I had it out. I found this on him." And he touched the money-belt strapped outside his hunting-shirt. "It'll help raise the militia you're going to need. Now for Red Hajason—and Elsie!"

"Hajason is on the ground here somewhere. Elsie and her father are near. Round up the rascals in the bush and I'll fetch her to you."

"No; I'll go with you. Stetson is wounded, but he can handle the fighting," cried Jackson.

A shout from Sevier, and Major Tonpit and his daughter descended from their hiding-place. Tonpit was stupefied by the defeat of his schemes and showed neither resentment nor interest in the young people's public avowal of their shameless preference for each other's arms.

"Creeks fooled. Cherokees quieted for a time at least. Spain blocked. Hajason wiped out," checked off Sevier as he rode ahead with the despairing major by his side. "Now for Bonnie Kate and the building of the new State."

ESCORTED by two thousand men in buckskin, the delegates met at Jonesboro on August twenty-third and voted that the people should elect fifteen representatives, who were to write a constitution for the new State and organize its Government. The North Carolina Legislature met in November and repealed the Cessions Act and granted all that had been asked in the Jonesboro petition. But the fifteen representatives proceeded, nevertheless, and created the State of Franklin with John Sevier as governor, thereby constituting one of the most unique chapters in American history.

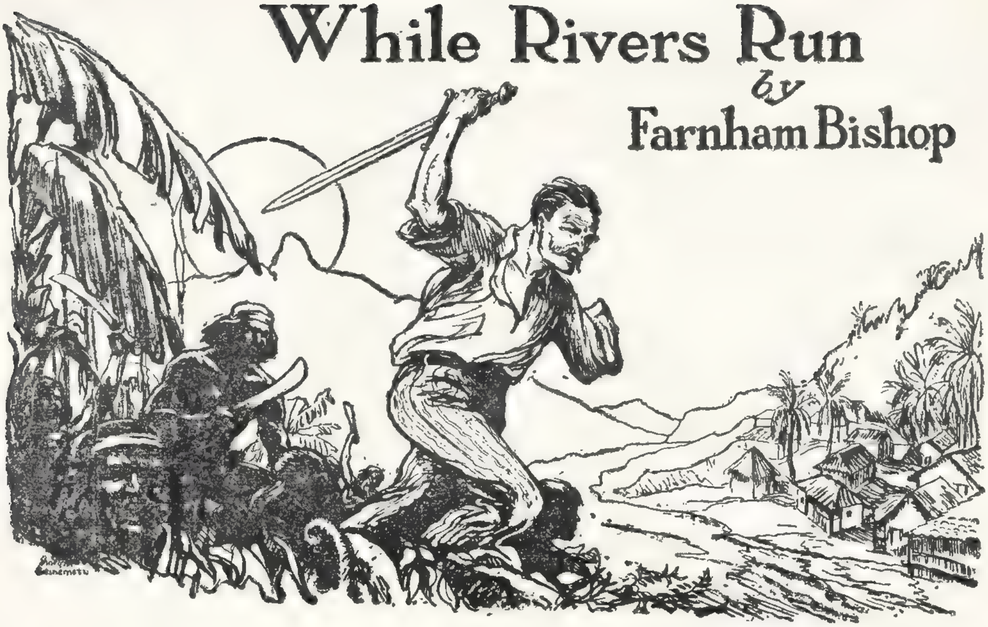
The new State endured for three years, then passed out of existence, to be recreated in time as Tennessee. How Sevier was outlawed by North Carolina, put on trial for high treason and rescued from the courtroom in a most amazing manner; how he was appointed brigadier-general by Washington, unanimously selected six times as governor of Tennessee and elected three times to Congress is told in history.

How in his last years he was often visited by John Watts and other chiefs, with whom he had fought, and how they partook of his hospitality and profited by his kind advice, rounds out a career seldom, if ever, equaled in all border chronicles.

THE END

While Rivers Run

by Farnham Bishop



NO NIGHT trains ran on the Panama Railroad then, in the desolate years that followed the collapse of the French Canal Company. A hand-car with four stalwart black Jamaicans at the brakes bore Trelawney, the British consul, southward from Panama City one moonlit night in the dry season of 1892.

Through a dozen abandoned camps, past millions of dollars' worth of machinery rusting in second-growth jungle, the hand-car clanked its way, till it was switched off the main line on to the private siding of the great plantation at Las Cascadas. As it came to a stop at the end of a long string of loaded cattle and freight-cars a tall white figure came striding down from the house. The right arm was raised in a gesture of welcome; the left sleeve was empty.

"Send your lads to the quarters, Trelawney! 'Tis mony a nicht since last we bade you welcome at Las Cascadas."

But the sallow little consul shook his head decisively.

"Get Mrs. Cameron and the boy," he commanded. "You three must come with me to Panama City at once!"

Stepping down from the hand-car, he walked with the planter half-way up the slope, till they were out of hearing of the Jamaicans. There the two paused, and the consul continued:

"Cameron, I never thought you'd be foolish enough to meddle in local plots and politics. But—those cases consigned to you as 'Machinery' were opened today by the authorities at Colon and found full of rifles and ammunition! How do you explain that?"

"What need to?" demanded Cameron bitterly. "My guilt is plain. Some one had turned informer."

"Some one!" snorted Trelawney. "Every one—except yourself! The witnesses against you are Sosa, Contreras, and Pedregal, the Müller brothers and General Bravo."

At the mention of those names, well-known on the Isthmus, Cameron's eyes grew hard and terrible. Trelawney continued, with the utter frankness of the diplomat freeing his soul.

"I found the whole pack, except Bravo, at the governor's palace when I went there, directly Saunders wired me from Colon about those rifles. They all swore they had only pretended to conspire with you in order to get proofs of your guilt—which they certainly did! Your name is stenciled on those packing-cases, written in the manifests, signed to papers that would hang an archbishop. Old Sosa produced a letter of yours offering to raise and arm a foreign legion to help free the Isthmus from Colombia and set up an independent Republic of Panama."

"The auld Judas!" muttered Cameron, "he was to ha' been president. But Bravo, ye say, was not there?"

"He was at Colon, seizing your rifles."

"Bravo has seized my rifles!" cried Cameron. "Why, 'twas he who came and showed how the land was ripe for revolt and pledged me a soldier's word to bring half the garrison to our side when I took the field with three hundred men. And now——"

"And now," said Trelawney, "he has not only betrayed you as he has a dozen others in my time, but he has armed his men with your new rifles and was marching them here this afternoon to kill you and sack this place, under pretext of an arrest, when I got wind of it and interfered. By threatening to cable for a gunboat I made the governor order Bravo to camp for the night at Matachin. He and his ruffians will be here the first thing in the morning. The only safe place for you and your family is the consulate."

He plucked at the other's sleeve but Cameron stood still.

"Bravo camps at Matachin, ye said?" he asked softly. "In the bend of the river, most like—I mind they drove a trench across there, last revolution. A good position—in its way. What force would Bravo have with him, could ye say, Trelawney?"

"What's that to you?" demanded the consul. "Are you mad enough, Cameron, to dream——"

Checking the Englishman's speech with a solemn gesture, Cameron pointed out over his fields towards the grass-grown, abandoned Culebra Cut.

"Aye, I ha' been mad enough to dream a dream of this bonny land freed of the spawn that misrule it and tilled as I ha' tilled my ane guid acres; a dream of the dredges at work again and great ships steaming through yonder glen—and a dream of finding honor and loyalty in the canny heart of a scheming traitor! I ha' dreamed—and I ha' waked!"

His deep voice vibrant with passion, his head thrown back, eyes blazing with righteous anger, his great body poised as if to leap and rend, Cameron stood there like a roused lion. Though his hair and short red beard were streaked with gray, he bore himself like an athlete in his prime. The planter's white linen suit could not disguise the Highlander, nor was the empty left sleeve needed to proclaim the veteran soldier.

Ronald Cameron had enlisted in the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders at the first news of the massacre of Cawnpore. He rose to be regimental sergeant-major and was leading the charge on the Egyptian lines at Tel-el-Kebir when a round-shot from an old-fashioned field-piece carried away his left arm. That was in '82. Had he remained in Egypt, Cameron would have made an ideal drill-master for native troops. But no one realized the need for such as he, in the brief lull between the fall of Arabi and the rise of the Mahdi.

The French engineers from Suez brought Cameron with them to Panama to organize a force of military police in the service of the Canal Company. But the Colombian authorities professed to see in it a nucleus of revolution and the Canal Police were disbanded, to the joy of the lawless. Cameron found new service with Don Ignacio de Guzman, who had need of a strong and honest *intendent* for his great plantation at Las Cascadas. When Don Ignacio died, in '87, the estate went to Cameron, who had married his old employer's only child. So Ronald Cameron became the great *hacendado,* Don Rinaldo Cameron.

He turned and wrung the consul's hand.

"Trelawney, ye ha' been real friend, to warn me of peril and offer me shelter under the auld flag. But ye maun yield me up the morn, to be tried and thrown to rot in Chiriqui Prison, my lands confiscate', my wife and wee Jamie left penniless. Take them wi' ye now, Trelawney, and keep them safe, while I bide here to welcome Bravo."

"My word!" cried Trelawney, unconsciously raising his voice. "Are you thinking of resisting arrest—asking your *mozos* to fight a regiment of Government troops?"

The answer came, not from Cameron, but from around the corner of the house, where a *mozo* had been listening—and had heard enough. A shriek of terror, the clang of a dropped tray, the thud of running feet, and the news had reached the servants' quarters. More shrieks in bastard Spanish, a flitting of white-clothed forms across the *patio*, over the fields, into the shadows of the jungle—the servants were gone.

"Rinaldo! What has happened?"

Mrs. Cameron came out of the house, her five-year-old boy sound asleep in her arms. Briefly her husband explained, in Spanish, the necessity of her going with Trelawney. She made a striking picture of motherhood as she stood there; as a girl, Maria de Guzman had been famed for her beauty, and it had not faded as it too often fades in the tropics.

"I thank the *Señor Consul* for his proffered hospitality," she said with the stately courtesy of her race. "But I am a Colombian and seek the protection of no flag but my own. And I am a de Guzman, and we do not fear to look our enemies in the face. I stay. May your Excellency go with God."

"What's puir Bravo's guns and gear to a heart like that, Trelawney?" cried Cameron, drawing her to him with his one great arm. "Bide, lass, and I'll keep ye safe."

"Come here!" exclaimed Trelawney, beckoning him toward the hand-car. "For your wife's sake, man, listen to reason! Old Sosa himself privately urged me to run down here tonight and get you two away before Bravo comes. Have you forgotten how he loved Doña Maria and hated you before your marriage? He still loves and hates like the savage brute he is; the rest want to share in the confiscation of your property, but what Bravo wants is the chance to kill you and take your wife."

"He shall have his chance," said Cameron calmly.

"And what chance will you have?" demanded the consul.

"All that a mon could ask."

"One against a regiment?"

Cameron was plainly embarrassed for a reply. Then, with a boyish smile, he answered:

"I will set you a riddle, Trelawney. Though the rains are two months past, and mony a stream run dry, is not the Chagres flowing still?"

"Yes. But what——"

"And are not the placer miners still panning gold on the Gatuncillo?"

"I believe so. But what——"

"It sorts not with your duty nor mine that I should speak more plain, Trelawney. But ponder, and it will come to you why I have no fear of Bravo, though he comes wi' a regiment at his back."

Trelawney pondered, till, just as he had seated himself upon the bench on the hand-car, a look of startled comprehension came over his face.

"Cameron," he cried, in crisp, official tones, "it is my duty to remind you that the revolutionary movement in which you have been participating has collapsed, and that any act of private warfare on your part would be brigandage. I have reason to believe that you, a British subject, are contemplating armed resistance to the local authorities; as the representative of her Majesty's Government, I forbid it, in the queen's name!"

"God save the queen!" said Cameron, saluting. "Five and twenty years I served her Majesty; but tonight I fecht for my ane hand and my son's heritage, brigandage though it be!"

MATACHIN today lies forty feet beneath the surface of Gatun Lake. In the old days it was under water only when the Chagres was in flood. But there was no danger of a flood that moonlit night in the dry season when Bravo encamped his regiment on Matachin Point.

The river, still running strong and deep after months of drought, protected two sides of the triangular encampment. The third side was guarded by a shallow trench with a high clay parapet. Within the space so enclosed four hundred conscripts lay, snoring or coughing, on the damp ground. Only the general had a tent, pitched beneath the one clump of trees.

Within the tent a squat, powerfully-built man turned restlessly on his camp-cot, waiting for the dawn, when he could start over the four-mile trail to Las Cascadas. Till Cameron was dead and his widow in Bravo's possession, the general meant to obey the governor's orders most punctiliously.

After his dangerous rival had been put out of the way and his own private desires gratified, then would be the time to revive the revolution, with himself as its sole military leader. The Isthmus was weary of being what the governor, a carpet-bagger from Bogotá, cynically called it: "the milch-cow of Colombia." Bravo aspired to be his own milk-man.

Unable to sleep, he rose, dressed and went to inspect his outposts. He had placed them not so much as a precaution against attack as against the possibility of some deserter's slipping away to warn Cameron, in the hope of a reward. There was a cordon of sentries along the trench and a picket in the village of Matachin beside the track of the Panama Railroad. The handful of thatched huts had been deserted by the villagers at their first glimpse of the soldiers, for Bravo's men came for the most part from the prisons of Cartagena and their ways were as evil as their reputation.

A row of glowing points along the trench told the general that his sentries were awake, with their backs against the parapet and their eyes on the camp. In the center of the trench was a Gatling, its brass jacket covered with canvas to protect it from the dew and from "Creeping Johnny," the river mist. Thick wisps of vapor writhed like living monsters over the ground. The moon was near its setting; as it sank behind the wooded ridge back of the village there was outlined against the silvery disk a notch where ran the trail leading to Las Cascadas.

Black against the moon stood out the figure of a man, tall and one-armed. A sword flashed in his upraised hand and from his lips came the centuries-old war-cry of Clan Cameron——

"Come, children of the hounds, here is flesh for your teeth!"

An answering yell rang from hundreds of savage throats. At the Highlander's heels, as he rushed down the slope, bounded dark forms brandishing gleaming blades. In every part of the wooded ridge they seemed to rise out of the ground as they swept in upon the village. A cry of alarm, two rifle-shots, a scream of pain and terror, and the picket was wiped out.

With his own hands Bravo tore the canvas off the Gatling, while he kicked and swore at the gun-crew sleeping beside the piece. A bugle shrieked; the camp swarmed with white-uniformed figures groping in the tall grass and the dying moonlight for their belts and rifles. Those that could find them in time tumbled into the trench, lined the parapet and fired as fast as they could pull trigger.

Pouring through the captured village and across the open meadow between it and the trench came the attackers — one white-clothed white man and a throng of naked Indians. A few wore narrow strips of bark-cloth; the rest were as bare as Greek warriors painted on a vase. They did not pause to fire, for they had not a single fire-arm; Cameron had his claymore, the Indians their *machetes*. They came on at terrifying speed, a wave of flesh and blood crested with shining steel.

Unused to their new high-powered rifles, most of the men in the trench instinctively fired too high. None paused to aim; they were "panic-firing." Nevertheless, some shots took effect; here and there a brown body crumpled to the earth, but still the charge swept on.

Then suddenly the Gatling began to speak, tearing a hole through the center of the attack. A score of Indians fell; the rest, alarmed even more by the awful sound than by the sight of the carnage, paused in their rush. The charge slowed, wavered and began to break. Cameron alone dashed on into the smoke-cloud out of which thrust the stabbing bursts of flame.

Through the dense mass of sulfurous smoke—for the machine-gun was an early model that used black powder—a giant wielding a gigantic blade sprang down among the startled gun-crew. The hand turning the crank was hewn off at the wrist; the skull of the crouching helper was crushed in by a blow from the iron pommel. The third gunner was cut down as he drew his pistol; the fourth as he turned to flee. The snarling crash of the Gatling died with its slaughtered crew.

Over the parapet poured a wave of naked men and naked steel, flooding out the trench as if the Chagres had suddenly risen. But Bravo was bringing up the rest of his regiment and fast getting them into close formation. Each well in advance of his men, the two leaders met.

Bravo had the courage as well as the treachery of a Benedict Arnold. Holding his saber on guard against the impending downward cut of the claymore, the Colombian stood firm, his revolver flashing again and again. But it took more than a pistol-bullet through the left shoulder to check Cameron's charge that night. Faster than any eye could follow, his great blade swerved as it fell, whipped round the saber's point and struck full-edge on the side of Bravo's neck. Something hard and round rolled among the feet of the stormers as the final charge struck home.

The Colombians were no cowards, but they were mongrels against thoroughbreds, city-born conscripts against forest warriors; they were bewildered, leaderless and too well armed. Bravo had taken away their familiar old rifles and given them new ones, strange from breech to bayonet; their fumbling fingers wasted priceless seconds opening the one and fixing the other. Leaping into the half-formed ranks, each Indian seized the nearest wavering rifle-barrel with his left hand, while with the right he plied the three-foot blade with which he could build his house, harvest his field or take his enemy's arm off at the shoulder joint.

The bravest of Bravo's men were hewn down like sugar-cane. The rest turned and fled to the furthest tip of Matachin Point, where those that could swim dropped their rifles and struck out for the opposite shore. More than one of these disappeared with a scream and a swirl of the yellow waters; but the crocodiles were few and the swimmers many. Some of the Indians picked up rifles and fired on the fugitives, while others waded out to swim after with knives in their teeth.

But Cameron soon put a stop to the butchery. Under his direction the captured arms and equipment were gathered and placed under guard. The uninjured prisoners were set to carrying their wounded comrades into the only floored building in the village—the railroad station. Pickets were posted on the trail and the track.

From across the river came great dugouts, paddled by armed Indians and ferrying back the wet and shivering Colombians who had tried to escape by swimming. Their places in the canoes were now filled by the Indian dead and wounded; thus freighted, the canoes were poled up the Chagres.

The captured Colombian officers were astonished by the silent efficiency with which these things were done. Each group of Indians, under the command of a chief or sub-chief, performed its allotted task with speed and skill. Presently the oldest of the Indians came to Cameron and said in his tribal tongue:

"O mighty one, all has been done as you commanded. Do we wait here for more enemies to come or do we go to meet them?"

"We go!"

◆

"COLONEL ORTIZ!" The governor of Panama gazed with astonishment at the second-in-command of General Bravo's regiment. Usually the smartest of military dandies, that gallant officer had arrived at the palace in a torn pink shirt and a pair of carpet slippers.

"They stripped us to our *zamisas*, excellency, after the battle——"

"Wait!" The governor turned to his aid, who had entered with the colonel. "Those five who were here with the consul yesterday afternoon—have them arrested and placed in close confinement at once!"

The aid saluted and went out, while the colonel continued:

"All save the regimental surgeon and the *cantineras*, who were permitted to attend the wounded in the station, were stripped to the shirt and herded together on the point below the trench, which was guarded by forty Indians with rifles. All that had been taken from us was carried over and piled beside the track.

"Presently from the south came a freight-train. It stopped at the station; the Indians, now clad for the most part in stolen uniforms and directed by that terrible Camerón, placed the arms and equipment on the train. All save our guard climbed aboard and the train proceeded, without lights, in the direction of Colon.

"Shivering, we passed the night through. At dawn the Indians guarding us had disappeared into the forest. I commandeered the first train from Colon, bringing with me to Panama City all that were left, save those too badly wounded to be moved."

"And your losses are——"

"Fifty-nine dead, seventy wounded, and about one hundred and fifty missing."

"One hundred and fifty missing—out of four hundred!" thundered the Governor. "Explain this, Colonel Ortiz!"

"Without pistols or insignia of rank—indeed, almost without clothing, how could we officers control the soldiery?" asked poor Ortiz, pulling his shirt down over his bony knees. "They mocked us, stole clothes and money from the passengers, deserted at every station and at every street-corner after reaching the city. Scarcely a hundred effectives are in the barracks now, under guard."

"Enough—you have demonstrated your unfitness for command! Go to your quarters and remain there under arrest!"

Bravo's regiment, half the garrison of the Isthmus, practically wiped out overnight! How could the governor explain to the Federal Government at Bogotá? He himself felt no need of an explanation: the five prominent citizens and experienced revolutionists who had pretended to denounce Cameron must have been plotting with him to draw Bravo into an ambush. Impatiently the governor awaited the return of the officer sent to arrest those men.

"Excellency," said the officer, half an hour later, "I have to report the death of Dr. Contreras, shot by my men while trying to escape arrest. The Müller brothers have taken refuge in the German Consulate. Don Francisco Sosa and Don Hernando Pedregal have left the city on fast horses, by the Chiriqui Trail."

Astounded by the news from Matachin spread through the city by the deserters, Bravo's five dupes had foreseen its effect on the gubernatorial mind. An appeal to justice meant months of horror in the seventeenth-century dungeons under the sea-wall, with poverty or a firing-squad at the end of it. Dr. Contreras succeeded only in getting himself shot without delay; the Müllers had only time to lock up their store and cross the street to the imperial consulate.

But Sosa, spurring along the trail to Chiriqui, was head of the family who had lorded it over that trouble-loving province for two centuries; Pedregal, who rode beside him, was the darling of the negroid masses in Colon and Panama City. Until Bravo had persuaded them to play Cameron false they had been preparing to start a revolution; now there was nothing for them to do but to go ahead with it.

"No one will believe that we did not have a hand in last night's business, Don Hernando," said shrewd old Sosa, "so let us take credit for it. As soon as we reach my country we can raise the banner of independence, proclaim the first victory, and trust Camerón to keep the governor busy till we are ready to march on Panama City."

"THERE wasn't any freight-train!" barked Hollister, the superintendent of the Panama Railroad. He had prickly heat, dyspepsia and no manners.

"But, *señor*, I myself—the whole regiment—saw and heard it!" protested Colonel Ortiz, slapping the breast of his new uniform.

"Can't help it," answered the American through his cigar; "facts are facts. In the first place, we're running no night trains at all. I didn't sign any orders for a special last night; every crew was abed and every engine in the house. However, we'll let that pass. You say this north-bound freight pulled out of Matachin about an hour before sunrise?"

"As nearly as I can estimate—for the Indians had my watch."

"And at sunrise No. 1 left Colon, southbound. You and your outfit took her at Matachin and rode in to Panama City. Why hain't those two trains met up somewhere on the thirty miles of single track between Colon and Matachin?"

"There are sidings at the stations, *señor.*"

"All empty—switches locked—train-crew and station-agents never saw a sign of a freight. The agent at Matachin doesn't know whether he did or not. He was down with Chagres fever last night and thought the battle was a new brand of delirium."

"Then the train must have run off the track," declared Ortiz.

"No sign of a wreck—take you up and down the line, colonel, and let you see for yourself."

"Would it not have been possible," asked Ortiz, after deep thought, "for the Indians, at the point where they abandoned the train, to have thrust it into the river?"

"They could have taken that train," said Hollister, "and run it through the jungle and up a palm tree."

DAINTILY picking his way across the foul mud of the Avenida Norte, a well-dressed stranger came to the gate of the palace.

"For his excellency," he said, handing a sealed envelope and a tactfully folded banknote to the officer of the guard. Five minutes later the stranger was ushered in to where the governor sat in consultation with Colonel Ortiz and other officers. With absorbed interest they were studying the contents of the envelope—a small kodak print.

"Where, *señor*, did you obtain this photograph?" demanded the Governor.

"I took it myself, in the camp of Camerón."

"You have been there! Where is it?"

A week had passed since the fight at Matachin and the disappearance of Cameron, the Indians and the mysterious freight-train. The plantation had been found stripped and deserted. But in spite of all the authorities could do they were still totally ignorant of where the raiders had come from, where they were hiding, and when they might strike again.

After kidnaping all the recruits his press-gangs could catch and levying a forced loan on the banks to buy arms and equipment, the governor had not more than seven hundred men. With these he had to hold two cities connected only by fifty miles of single-track railroad, on either side of which stretched almost unbroken jungle.

Somewhere in that jungle Cameron had at least three hundred warriors. Detachments sent in search of them ventured no more than a mile or so along the broadest and best-known trails. A more popular method was to board a Panama Railroad train and ride back and forth between the two cities. This cost nothing, for the railroad had to carry government troops free of charge. But also, it led to nothing.

In the meanwhile Pedregal's agents had been stirring up unrest in both Colon and Panama, while open revolt had broken out in Chiriqui. Old Sosa, modestly calling himself "The Victor of Matachin," had raised the banner of independence in the plaza of David, the provincial capital. The local garrison had gone over to his forces, which would soon be ready to march on Panama City.

Obviously, the governor needed to locate and eliminate Cameron without further delay. He and his officers stared at the stranger, who did not look as if he had come from a camp. From the pipe-clayed shoes to an Ecuador hat of silkiest weave, he looked like a Fifth Avenue tailor's dream of the tropics. His face, except at the corners of the eyes, was that of a young, high-caste Japanese.

"More photographs, *caballeros*, and my card."

Pictures of Indians unloading freight-cars, of Doña Maria at the door of her tent, of Cameron lighting his pipe with a brand from the camp-fire—there could be no doubt of the origin of the photographs. Eagerly the officers studied the background of each scene for a clew to the location of the camp but could find none.

The governor picked up the card and read:

MR. JOHN TULÉ, C. E.,

ENGINEERS' CLUB NEW YORK.

"You are not an American of the north!" he exclaimed.

"I am a San Blas."

Only too well the Colombians knew the name of that great tribe of Indians whose home is the eastern or South American end of the Isthmus—the land that was once called Darien. They send certain of their young men north to be educated at the tribal expense, put to death every white or black man found inside their borders after nightfall and justify the saying that "no one has ever seen a San Blas half-breed."

The governor seized one of the photographs and examined it closely.

"These other Indians—they are also San Blas!"

John Tulé nodded.

"Last year your Government sent an invading force against us—not quite three per cent. of its membership had the good fortune to return alive. This year we are returning the visit."

"But why do you fight for Cameron?" asked Colonel Ortiz.

"Because the rivers flow and gold is still to be found," said the Indian, as if that were the most reasonable explanation in the world.

The Colombians stared at him and at each other, till they reached the conclusion most natural to their type of mind.

"Your excellency offered ten thousand *pesos*, gold, to any one who could bring about the capture of Cameron," said one of the officers, "and this young man doubtless prefers Broadway to his native forests. Among *caballeros* of honor, what more need be said?"

THAT afternoon two hundred soldiers took No. 3 at Colon and detrained at Matachin. Three hundred more, commanded by the Governor in person, rode from Panama City on No. 4, which was consequently without other passengers and an hour and forty-seven minutes late, to the disgust of the American train-crew.

Closely followed and watched by two sergeants, who carried cocked revolvers and had orders to shoot him if he made an outcry or attempt to escape, John Tulé led the way northward along the railroad. Behind him shuffled the five hundred infantrymen in column of fours. On their right hand flowed the Chagres; on the left rose the greenish-brown wall of the parched jungle.

At a curve in the track, about a mile and a half north of Matachin, Tulé stopped, pointed and said to the commander of the advance guard—

"Tell your men to tear down those vines."

A dozen soldiers tugged at a thick mass of *ianas* hanging between two great trees. Matted together but free at the bottom and sides, the vines swung out like a curtain, then, under the stress of unskilled handling, tore away at one upper end and fell rustling to the ground.

An adventurous soldier darted into the broad, dark opening thus revealed and cried out in astonishment—

"*Un ferrocarril!* A railroad!"

It was indeed a railroad, long abandoned to the jungle, which had recently been cleared away sufficiently to let a train pass over the rusty rails and through the living tunnel of overarching boughs and tangled vines.

"Here went the freight-train!" exclaimed Colonel Ortiz. "But how?"

John Tulé pointed to a pile of ties and rails.

"This old French construction track is on the same grade as the P. R. R. and at this point less than ten yards away. We had all night to make a connection and take it up again. I saw to that detail myself."

"This leads, then, to the camp of Cameron?"

Tulé nodded.

"He planned it all, months ago, for a secret base for the proposed revolution. Under pretence of shipping his crop he had obtained enough cars to carry supplies from Las Cascadas. The San Blas came to the plantation to receive the rifles that were to come from Colon. But Bravo seized the rifles—you know the rest."

"I do not know where you obtained the locomotive to draw the freight-cars," said Ortiz as the column advanced cautiously over the crumbling ties.

"You will see in a moment," replied Tulé.

Presently he pointed ahead and to the left. There, on a siding, stood three of the little six-wheeled Belgian locomotives used by the French and abandoned by them to the jungle. Vines clambered over the cabs, flowers had taken root in the coal carried in high, square bunkers slung like saddle-bags on either side of the cold, rusting boilers. A sturdy sapling was sprouting out of the nearest stack.

"Your civilization—tomorrow," said the San Blas. "There were four of these engines; we repaired the best. You will find it with the train in the camp at the end of the line."

"Is it far?"

"Less than half a mile."

"Lead on, then," commanded Ortiz—the governor was back with the main body, "and remember, at the first sign of treachery, you will be shot."

They proceeded in tense silence, every soldier expecting a sudden volley, the colonel wishing it were possible to throw out flankers, the two sergeants keeping their eyes on John Tulé as he walked a pace ahead of them down the middle of the track. They were ready to shoot if he raised his voice or darted for the screen of undergrowth on either hand. They were ready for anything, as they explained afterward, except to see the earth open and swallow him up before their eyes.

The ground between two ties crumbled away beneath Tulé's feet, dropping him into a square black hole. A sergeant fired, but the bullet passed over the Indian's head and shoulders as they disappeared underground. The other sergeant hesitated for a moment, then recklessly jumped feet-foremost into the hole.

His feet struck a sloping surface and shot out from under him. He found himself sliding on his left side down a steep, narrow chute smoothly lined with strips of bamboo. Then he flew out into the air and dropped, safe and sound, on a pile of soft earth. Just as he was starting to get up his faithful comrade dropped accurately on top of him.

The two sergeants disentangled themselves, picked up their dirt-clogged pistols and looked about them. On all sides was a dense thicket of wild banana, its close-ranked stems taller than the head of a man on horseback. Somewhere in the heart of that thicket Mr. John Tulé, C. E., was doubtless making good speed along a private trail. The sergeants looked at each other, swore and made the best of their way back up the steep, overgrown hillside to the track.

There a council of war was held and the decision reached to continue the advance. Scouts were thrown out, who presently reported a freight-train standing motionless on the track ahead. Dashing gallantly forward, the Colombian troops surrounded the train and burst into the outlaw camp. It was absolutely deserted.

"SIZZLING JUDAS!" swore Cap'n Dan Comber, conductor of No. 4, as the reached Gorgona, the next stop after Matachin. "More blinkety-blank dashed *soldados!*"

The station platform was crowded with white uniforms—uncommonly clean ones, too. Cap'n Dan, however, was in no appreciative mood toward Central American soldiery—he was tired of carrying them for nothing and said so in strong and wonderful words. Then he choked in mid-oath, for sheer amazement, at the sight of Cameron.

"Twa hundred and seventy-three second-class, twa firsts, to Colon," said the Scot, placing a small, heavy canvas pouch in the conductor's hand. "The agent has no that mony tickets so I'm paying ye cash fare. Here's a bit present for you and the ither lads. The wires are doon, they tell me, so ye needna try to send ony telegrams. Pit that Gatling in the baggage-car! Lively, there, B Company!"

Men, munitions and equipment poured into the train through every door and window. Nine minutes later, they were on their way toward Colon. No one in Bailemonos, San Pablo, Frijoles or any of the other towns through which the outlaw troop-train sped thought that its uniformed passengers were not what they seemed. The American trainmen grinned broadly but said nothing.

"I kenned fine who'd be leaving this train at Matachin and where they'd be gaein'," said Cameron to his old friend Cap'n Dan in the first-class non-smoker, where he sat with Doña Maria and wee Jamie. "So we marched betimes through the woods to the back o' Gorgona. I'll teach these folk a lesson they'll no forget i' the strategic value o' railways i' modern warfare!"

THE sentry at the gate of the fort on Monkey Hill, that overlooked and dominated the city of Colon, observed with languid interest the approach of No. 4. The train made its usual stop at the foot of the path leading up the hill to the gate of the fort. As far as the sentry could see, no passengers got off. The train pulled out, revealing Cameron standing with drawn claymore at the head of his men. They had got off through the windows on the further side.

Before the paralyzed sentry could give the alarm, they were charging up the hill. Before a shot could be fired in defense they were swarming over the walls of the fort. Not a blow was struck by the nine terror-stricken recruits and the drunken bugler who composed the garrison. The rest of the battalion supposed to hold this important post had gone that morning to Matachin.

With his own hand Cameron hauled down the Colombian flag and ran up another of strange design: a rampant red lion on a golden field.

HUGGING their shallow trenches, the besieging Government troops pumped volley after unaimed volley in the general direction of the fort on Monkey Hill, known now as Fort Saint Andrew. Their bullets shattered the glass insulators on the riddled telegraph poles along the track of the Panama Railroad running between the besiegers' trenches and the foot of the hill.

From the ramparts and loop-holes of Fort Saint Andrew and the deep, new trenches around it came only contemptuous silence. Down the hill a huddle of sprawling bodies in soiled white uniforms showed the fate of the one attempt at direct assault.

A field-piece barked from a hummock in the half-dry swamp back of the Colombian position. It had taken three days of heart-breaking toil to bring it up and emplace it there. Its first shell curved high over the fort and burst harmlessly above the jungle beyond. But the infantrymen in the trenches cheered joyously at the encouraging sound of their own artillery.

A huge old muzzle-loader thundered from Fort Saint Andrew. An eleven-inch sphere of cast-iron buried itself deep in the heart of the hummock; two hundred pounds of black powder scattered fragments of field-piece, gunners and hummock far over the surface of the swamp. A crackle of rifle-fire ran round the top of the hill and a storm of high-powered bullets swept the besieging trenches.

Then abruptly the firing ceased on both sides. Its engine whistling imperiously, a train was coming toward them from Colon. On a flat-car placed in front of the locomotive were a dozen bluejackets and a machine-gun, behind a parapet of sandbags; more seamen and marines looked hopefully out from the day-coaches. Stopping the train in the middle of the battlefield, the American Navy officer in command summoned the leaders of the opposing forces.

"There must be no more of this fighting on the line of the Panama Railroad," he declared when Cameron and the governor had joined him beside the rear platform. "By the Treaty of 1846, the United States Government is charged with the duty of keeping the transit open and unmolested."

"I hae a suggestion," said Cameron. "When the engine-driver hears a battle ahead, let him gi'e twa blasts on the wheestle, and baith sides will cease firing till he judges he's safe past and gie's us anither blaw."

This appealed to the sporting instincts of the naval officer, but the governor rejected it furiously.

"You force me to raise the siege of this place and withdraw my forces to Panama City; to abandon the whole line of the railroad to brigands and rebels," he cried accusingly.

"Ye drivillin' auld gowp," said Cameron scornfully, "ye're fair leapin' at the excuse. Ye canna take the fort, ye dare na bide here anither day, wi' Sosa marchin' doon fra' Chiriqui. Ye canna keep me from joining forces wi' him and storming Panama City. 'Tis your last chance, here and now, to make a separate peace wi' me on my ain terms."

"I offer no terms to outlaws and murderers!"

"So be it."

Turning on his heel, Cameron strode away toward the fort, his heavy claymore clanking against his thigh.

"Wait!" shrilled the governor. "What are your terms?"

"A passport for mysel' and family, a draft on the Bank o' England for the value o' my estate, an amnesty for my allies."

"Your allies—you mean Sosa and Pedregal?"

"I do not—ye may deal wi' those twa lying tricksters as ye please, unless ye force me to fight beside them. My allies are the San Blas. 'Tis no the first time they ha' fought beneath the Red Lion o' Scotland.

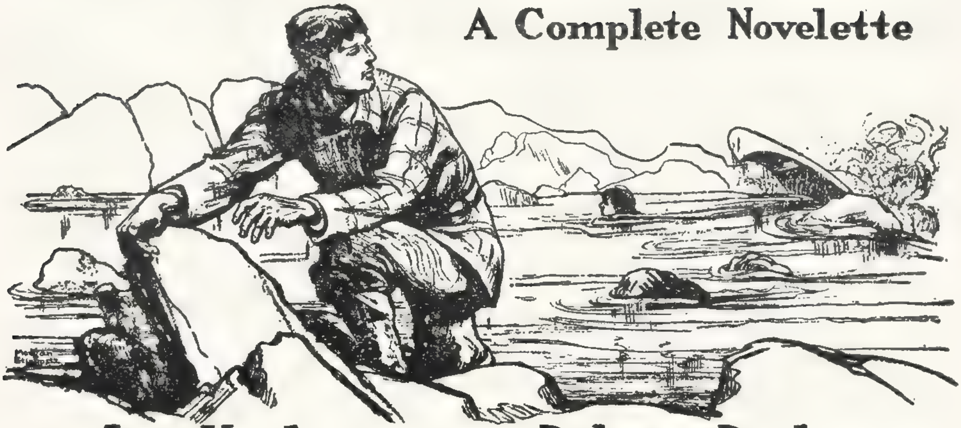
"Twa hundred years ago there was an attempt to found a Scotch colony i' Darien. It came to an ill end, but first a solemn treaty o' alliance was entered into between the colonists and the San Blas. That treaty the Indians remember and abide by to this day."

"After two centuries, *señor?*" asked the governor incredulously.

"I will quote you the text," said Cameron. "'The Scots and the San Blas shall be allies while rivers run and gold is found in Darien.'"

Smooth Prizes

A Complete Novelette



by Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton

Authors of "The Gift of the Barren Grounds," "Spirits of Spirit Lake," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE CHALLENGE

THERE were five chairs before a certain fireplace in the Explorers' Club. They had become by common consent the exclusive property of five members. A sixth chair was never added. With a little squeezing there might have been room, but none of the five ever moved over.

There were no rules regarding this particular fireplace. Any member might have appropriated a seat before it. But no one ever did. When any of the five was absent from the city, his chair stood vacant, a silent tribute from the club. For the club was proud of "The Corner," as it was called, and welcomed the tradition that marked these men apart.

It was not that the five had adjudged themselves the court of last resort on all questions pertaining to the far places. Few members were more modest than they, or less inclined to talk of their own experiences. Nor was it that they had declared themselves superior to the others.

No one was more quick than any of the five to recognize a well-executed expedition, a new bit of country charted, an added piece of wilderness conquered. It was only that they were drawn together by that strongest of all ties, the joint possession of a knowledge, of a vision, that few men can know.

Although not a member of the club could have phrased the thought, could have stated it in definite terms, all were proud of The Corner, were willing and anxious to honor its members because they knew that these five alone had gained for themselves that strange, incomprehensible something that marks the real dwellers in the raw places of the world, those places in which men's souls are forged.

It must have been a realization of this that saved them all from any resentment that a sixth chair had never been added for Curtis Baird. While the club respected the members of The Corner and honored them for their achievements, it loved Curtis Baird. There was a refreshing, buoying quality in him. Every inch of his six feet of agility and physical competence was a-tingle with it.

The air of welcome which stirred each group in the room when he entered was a tribute to it. Always when he joined a knot of men those in other groups edged toward him. Cigars burned unnoticed while he talked, talked as only Curtis Baird could of out-of-the-way places and little-known people.

It was not alone that he had traveled farther, charted more country and brought home more specimens than any other member of his age. It was rather the air with which he had done it. Success had been his seemingly without his asking. Yet he had never lost his sense of modesty or of proportion. No one in the club was more glad of another's triumph or more tireless in helping a fellow member.

Even the five in The Corner turned to Curtis Baird whenever there was a question of barren ground equipment, Eskimo dress and manners, or any of the other strange bits of stored knowledge that every wanderer in the far places must have. Perhaps it was this fact that caused some to wonder why it was that this strong, virile, successful adventurer had never been accorded a sixth chair.

Any one who had seen Curtis Baird swing into the club-room that afternoon would have understood why such a thought had never occurred to him. There was simply no room for it in his happy acceptance of life and all the good things that it held for him. He called a greeting to some, held up his hand in the Eskimo sign of friendliness to the far groups and was preparing to settle down in one of the big chairs when the five in The Corner swung around upon him.

"Glad you came," barked Tormey, who held the floor. "I wanted an example of what I've been saying, and you're the best I know of. Look at him, gentlemen! I doubt if any member of the club has traveled more, though he's about the youngest. He's a marvel in languages. Knows a little Eskimo, fair Cree and good Chippewyan. Can tell the difference between Dog-Rib and Slavey dialects.

"He's been down the entire length of three of the biggest rivers on the continent, the Mackenzie, the Yukon and the Great Fish. He's wintered on Great Bear Lake and on the east end of Great Slave.

"He's shot every kind of big game on the continent. He knows all the slight variations in wolves and caribou. He has given as many specimens to the American Museum as any one. He's dug up some rare botanical bits. He's charted a few unknown lakes and rivers.

"Now, Curtis," and he shook his finger at Baird, "tell me! Why did you do it? Was it a desire to add to the world's store of knowledge that sent you out on those ten thousand miles of wanderings?"

C BAIRD was accustomed to this sort of questioning from the five. Apparently there had been an argument and Tormey was determined to prove his point. It had been this way before. Sometimes it mystified him, and always it made him a bit uneasy. Now he adopted his usual course and grinned good naturedly at the perturbed five and remained silent.

"Of course you didn't!" exclaimed Tormey. "Science never sent you anywhere. What did then? A desire for fame?"

"You know that isn't it," interrupted Ryan, who was never as merciless in his probing as the others. "Outside of this club and the American Museum, no one ever heard of Baird. He's no advertiser."

"I know it," Tormey continued. "But that only adds to the mystery. Why did he go?"

"Men go into unknown places for two reasons," Williams began in his leisurely manner.

"I know," grunted short-sighted Henry Macklin; "science and sport. Every thing is grouped under one head or the other. There are a few men who have taken great risks solely to satisfy a desire to add to the world's store of knowledge. There have been such men, but there are a heap more who only believed they have that desire. It's adventure and romance, the thrill of being first, that gets them. It's a game, a man's game, I'll admit, but it's sport pure and simple."

"Then why do they bother with lugging home specimens?" asked Ryan quietly.

"That's an excuse, not for the public, but for themselves," answered Tormey. "Men who play always defend themselves in some such way."

"But what's wrong with it?" asked Williams.

"Nothing, if they get what they go after, if they really play the game. But how many of them do? The trouble with us is that we follow the band. Whenever it escorts any one we applaud. And we go by surface results, not methods or motives or——"

"Spiritual development," interrupted Brainerd.

Tormey glared at him and then continued:

"What I mean is this: If a man starts at Edmonton and then goes through to Dismal Lake and spends a Winter there, and then crosses over to the Coppermine and goes down to the sea and along the coast to Point Barrow and takes a whaler to Frisco, everybody gives it to him. He's some traveler. He's braved the arctic. He's dared the unknown.

"Now if that man did it with one Indian or Eskimo companion I'd give it to him. But you know as well as I do that a man can do that very thing and never be in as much danger as he is right here in a big city, and just about as comfortable, too. With mighty few exceptions it's been the history of exploration. A trip to the arctic coast anywhere on this continent can be made a pleasure jaunt with the right sort of planning, equipment, food and enough men.

"Why," and he struck the arm of his chair savagely, "I get riled every time I hear the name of Captain Back. I know he's dead and gone, but when he writes of his journey I wonder what he ever went along for, so far as accomplishing anything goes. Some of those fellows howled if they had to carry a ten-pound pack or were left alone at meal time and had to build a fire."

"That's merely the English naval officer's way of doing it," said Ryan. "Or was. Shackelton made it *passé*."

"You can't say that Stefansson——" Macklin began.

"And how about Hanbury?" interrupted Williams. "He is an Englishman."

"What's the difference?" demanded Ryan. "If a man can hire things done, why should he do them? Besides, an explorer must have leisure for——"

"Leisure, rot!" snorted Tormey. "Most of them aren't explorers. They're sportsmen, out for a good time, and they have it in the easiest way possible. And that's why I point to Baird as an example. On the surface he's accomplished a lot, in specimens and information and ground covered. He's heard about the explorer's duty and he's tried to fulfill it. But did you ever notice this? Baird has never had an accident, never gone two whole days without food, never lost a man, never been overdue. He's gone out solely for adventure, and he's built a wall around himself to keep adventure away."

"He ought to have credit for that," declared Williams. "There isn't a man I know of I'd rather make a trip with. I'm certain I'd get back on time, in good health and with every objective attained."

"Except adventure."

"I'd as soon be personally conducted in a love affair."

"Being able to handle Indians or Eskimos as he does is something."

"Your own idol says an adventure is a sign of incompetence."

"Look at what Hubert Darrel——"

"And he died doing it."

Every one talked at once, insistently, with some heat, all without regard to the others.

It was always through such travail and bickering that the decisions of The Corner suddenly emerged. This time it was Brainerd who reached into the boiling pot and extracted it.

Of all the men in the club, Brainerd alone had never been north of fifty-four, and fifty-four runs only one hundred and fifty miles above the tip of Maine. He did not know any Indian language. He had never seen a barren ground caribou. He had never collected a rare specimen for a museum.

But three months in every year always found Brainerd in Canada, anywhere east of Winnipeg. Sometimes it was in Summer, sometimes in Winter. Rarely did he travel more than three hundred miles from a railroad. But Brainerd always went alone.

THAT one fact had given him a niche in the club all his own. Men from the arctic listened respectfully on the rare occasions when he talked. He had never been far, had never seen the land of no trees, was not an authority on any of the big things pertaining to the wilderness. Yet each year he spent ninety days alone, ninety days of canoeing or snowshoeing, cooking his own meals, packing his own outfit, killing his own food.

Nor was it exactly the fact that he made his annual journeys without companions that had won him respect among the seasoned veterans of the farther North. It was because Brainerd alone could carry back to those rooms in the great city a breath of the wilderness. Others could return to tell of strange lands and stranger adventures. Some were master story-tellers, too, but only Brainerd could instill within that room the spirit of the North, could make it flare up anew within the walls of stone and steel.

On the rare occasions when Brainerd talked, there was a quiet audience of every member present. Some one would turn out the lights, leaving only the glow of the fire. It was a coal fire, yet there was an odor of burning wood in the rooms. Faint leaf rustlings could be heard in corners. The roar of the street became the murmur of rapids. Men would glance up at the ceiling to read tomorrow's weather in the sky. When they struck matches they cupped their hands against the breeze.

It seemed to be wizardy, this power of the man to bring the spirit of the North to the great city. None escaped the spell of it, and none had ever analyzed how he did it. Perhaps he best expressed it himself when he pronounced sentence on Curtis Baird.

"It's this," he said, and the other four ceased speaking. "It's not what a man does in the wilderness. It's what the wilderness does in him. With most men the wilderness has no opportunity. They are too busy going somewhere, finding something. They are armored against the wilderness with energy and enthusiasm, with plans and hopes. They arrange a journey down to the last detail, the modern method, and then spend every minute keeping each detail in its place.

"They never relax, such men, and most of them are such. They come out as they went in, unchanged, unaffected. They don't live in the wilderness, they only pass through it. The wilderness is a means, never the end. They go into it, to conquer and to survive. I'm not detracting from their efforts. It's a stiff fight, and it's a game fighter who comes out whole.

"But I have a theory, which must always remain a theory. I believe that the man who goes into the wilderness and never comes back, the man who loses, becomes thoroughly of it before he dies. Perhaps it comes to the man who almost loses. I don't know. Perhaps I'm foolish. Perhaps there's nothing in what I think, rather what I feel. But twice I have seen it, the change the wilderness has wrought in a man.

"To me that means more than any discovery, any rare specimen, any addition to a map. Civilization has built up a complex structure and we've forgotten that the individual is its base. Everything has become collective, but, as for me, I would rather a man go out alone and find his soul, than to go armored with hired men and manufactured equipment and find a continent."

The Corner always cast a silent vote. That was its method, and now no one spoke. Curtis Baird, who knew the ways of The Corner, glanced uneasily at each member. A man never went into the empty places to find his soul. That was left for churches.

He asked himself why he had not been a success. It was true that he had never lost a man, never starved, never been overdue. That was to his credit. He had been efficient, thorough, far-seeing. The club conceded that. But now The Corner had declared him a failure. Why? He did not contest their decision. For years The Corner had been infallible. It had never erred.

Rather it mystified him. The men's faces showed that they were not joking. They were in earnest. They found him lacking because of the very qualities which had won for him the respect of the club as a whole. And because he was mystified Curtis laughed, a little uneasily but with assurance.

"Then there's no more chance for me," he said. "I'm through. I've made my last trip."

All except Brainerd looked up in surprize.

"Seen everything, eh?" asked Tormey.

"Enough."

"You're crazy, man!" cried Williams. "There's a lot to be done yet, and you have nothing else to do. You have money and leisure and no one is better fitted to put through a successful expedition."

"And I've something for you to find," added Ryan. "You know that strip of country between the Kazan and the west coast of Hudson Bay. It's two hundred miles wide and five hundred long, and no white man has ever been in it except Hearne, nearly a century and a half ago. He only crossed the lower end while Tyrrell merely skirted the upper. It's unknown land, the greatest stretch of it on the continent, and the nearest home, too. It's a virgin field and I found a map today which shows that woods are reported in the center of it, way up beyond the northern limit of timber, an oasis in the Barren Grounds."

"That's Hearne's fabled oasis," said Williams.

"No," declared Ryan, "that's generally conceded to be the timber along the Thelon, way over to the northwest of the place I mean. This is something new. I never heard it mentioned before. Why don't you go after it, Baird?"

"No, I'm through with the North," answered Curtis. "Anyhow, what's the use? If I did go and discover this oasis you fellows would find fault with the way I did it, perhaps because I didn't discover my soul in the center of it."

"Perhaps you would," said Brainerd quietly. "And I think you will go, Curtis."

"Sure he'll go," snorted Tormey. "I know. I've seen men quit the North before, quit it for good—for about two years."

Curtis laughed easily and started away.

"No," he said, "you knockers have driven me out of the North. A man can't cache his reputation or anything else in this club with a bunch of wolverenes like you fellows loose. Hand your oasis to some one else. I'm afraid to touch it. You might plant some one's else soul up there, and I'd find it and think it was mine."

As he left the club his decision seemed to be definitely made for the first time. It had been smoldering within him for weeks. The words of The Corner had suddenly crystallized it.

It was not pique that did this. He had long been considering such an announcement. At first it had grown out of a feeling of accomplishment and a dread of the spell of the North. He had been over the whole situation many times. His father's business demanded his presence. His own list of achievements was as long as that of any man in the club. And there seemed to be nothing more to accomplish.

THE focal point of his argument, however, had been the fact that he was afraid of the spell of the North country. Already he had begun to feel its force. Formerly he had been able to salve his conscience with the thought that his expeditions were doing something for science, were adding to the world's knowledge of the far places. That had justified his explorations.

But he knew the subtle, powerful intoxication of the wilderness. He had seen men, strong men, men who could have made their mark, chained to the North, returning to it again and again, long after the possibility of accomplishing anything had passed. He did not wish to become one of these wanderers of the world, and he had resolved to quit, to give it up while he could. Later perhaps, when there was an opportunity to do something real, something big, he might go back.

It was not until the judgment of The Corner had been passed upon him that he had come to a definite decision, however. It had arisen from a sudden realization of the futility of it all. He had done much, could point to definite accomplishments. But Brainerd, who had nothing that he could claim, had passed sentence upon him. And it had been accepted.

He believed the decision definitely made when he went to bed that night. But he found that he could not sleep. The words of The Corner kept returning to him, intriguing him to bring forth a possible solution. He wondered what he had failed to gain from his experiences that the others had found. The suggestion of Ryan teased him into vague, tentative plans to find the fabled woods. The quiet words of Brainerd, who was so assured that he would go, seemed to exert a soft force upon his will.

Suddenly he sat up. He would go, at once, without any announcement of his plan to the Explorers' Club. He would find the oasis, chart the lakes and rivers, add to his already long list of achievements. He would find for himself the truth of the opinion of The Corner.

Always before he had gone armored against the wilderness, had been sent forth to victorious battle by his admiring friends, had been provided with the best equipment that time and money and knowledge could obtain.

He arose from his bed and began to pack. In the morning he stepped aboard a train for Winnipeg. His only preparation was a wire to his old guides, Joe and Michel, to be waiting for him there.

CHAPTER II

THE ACCEPTANCE

ON JULY eighteenth Joe Le Garde cut his foot with an ax. Luckily this happened only a few miles south of Du Brochet, the most northerly post of the Hudson's Bay Company, between Hudson Bay and the Mackenzie waterway.

The Du Brochet post manager readily agreed to care for Joe until he was able to travel and declared that there would be no difficulty in finding a Chippewyan who would take his place in the canoe. His easy assurance in the matter did not altogether remove Curtis Baird's presentiment of disaster. This grew out of several factors.

Curtis had been proud of his record of never having injured a man on any of his expeditions. It had seemed to imply an extreme efficiency. Now, although the accident had been one he could not possibly have prevented, his record had been broken and he suffered a vague loss of confidence in his own powers. Then, he did not like to lose Joe's services. In many thousands of miles he had learned his guide's value and dependency.

But above all else he knew the unwisdom of depending upon a native Indian in Eskimo country. That mistake alone had wrecked more than one expedition that might otherwise have gone on to success. There is nothing more unreasoning or more undependable than a frightened native.

The enmity and distrust between the Indians and the Eskimos had grown out of strange, garbled tales of one another and some real atrocities of a bygone warfare. Against it Curtis knew he would be powerless.

There was, however, nothing else to do. Summer was half over. If they were to go on at all it must be at once. So he proceeded north from Du Brochet with Michel and a Chippewyan.

Curtis had deliberately chosen the longer and more difficult route to Maguse Lake, near which the fabled woods were reported, The logical way would have been to go to Fort Churchill, from where it was only four hundred miles by canoe up the coast of Hudson Bay and then up the Little Fish River to the The-anni and his destination.

But Curtis had decided to start north from Cumberland House instead, crossing the Churchill river and going on to the north end of Reindeer Lake. There he would strike the headwaters of the Little Fish, follow it down to the mouth of the The-anni and then go up to Maguse Lake.

There were several reasons for this. Against the disadvantage of being the longer route it held forth the great temptation of offering several hundred miles of unknown country. He could enter the great unexplored district at its southwest corner, cross to its east side and then angle back through the center, leaving it by some way to be discovered near the northeast corner.

Further, and the point captivated Curtis, he would be the first white man to travel the Little Fish. Captain Back's discovery of the Great Fish River had always been, to him, a fascinating bit of subarctic history. Curtis had never discovered a river of consequence. Now he could map the Little Fish, of which nothing was known except from Indian reports.

Even for the harder route Curtis had resolved not to enlarge his party. He knew Joe and Michel, could depend upon them. They could carry adequate supplies, and there was every opportunity for game and fish. And he had been influenced more than he would admit by the accusation of The Corner of always having provided a buffer between himself and the wilderness.

The accident to Joe had been his first setback. The Curtis of old would have waited, would never have taken the unwarranted chance of proceeding on such a journey with only one guide upon whom he could depend.

But somehow he felt the eyes of The Corner upon him. It had suddenly flashed over him that perhaps they meant that he was afraid, that he went too well armored, that he made success certain. It had been only a suspicion, but it meant that he could not go back. So he acted impulsively and proceeded with the Chippewyan in Joe's place.

The Chippewyan did very well. He knew the route up the Cochrane river and beyond to Theitaga, or Sandy Lake, from where they turned eastward. He had been as far as Nueltin, or Frozen Island Lake, and he took Curtis down an unknown stream, the beginning of the Little Fish River, to Nueltin without any hesitation or delay. He was proving a good guide.

But at Nueltin Lake he insisted upon stopping a day to visit a venturesome relative he found camped there. The relative brought out a rusty trade gun he had found and the two examined it. While Curtis and Michel were cooking supper the Indians loaded the gun to try it.

The relative fired the gun. The Chippewyan guide stood beside him. A piece was blown out of the barrel and it entered the guide's skull.

For ten days Curtis and Michel remained and did all they could for the injured man. Then he died. Curtis tried in vain to persuade the relative to take his place.

This second disaster only whetted Curtis' desire to go on. He felt now that if he turned back he justified the judgment of "The Corner." He must go on to prove that he, too, could meet the vicissitudes of the North country as does a man stripped for battle.

When the relative was uninfluenced by any inducement, Curtis turned inquiringly to Michel.

"You better as two these Indians," said the guide confidently. "We go alone."

They found the outlet of Nueltin Lake, the Thlewiaza, or Little Fish River, and went down to the eastward. Four days after leaving Nueltin Lake they came to a large stream flowing into the Little Fish from the north. This, Curtis believed, was the The-anni, and they turned up.

The-anni is Chippewyan for "rocky bank." No white man had ever seen this stream, but they found that the Indians selected appropriate names. They toiled for two weeks, tracking and wading and portaging.

THE air presaged approaching Winter. It wakened the old caution which hurt pride had lulled to sleep. Reason told Curtis that it was little short of madness to go on. They two were alone with Winter at hand. Geographically they could not have chosen a worse place on the continent. Straight east about one hundred and twenty miles was the western shore of Hudson Bay. One hundred and eighty miles down that shore was the nearest white man, at Fort Churchill. To reach it would mean a journey of more than four hundred miles.

Toward the southwest, from which they had come, it was nearly twice as far to Du Brochet. Northeast, Marble Island was two hundred and fifty miles as the crow flies. Depot Island was one hundred miles farther. There was a bare possibility that a whaler might be wintering at one or the other. To the west the nearest white man was at Fort Resolution, five hundred miles airline. Curtis called a halt.

"We're crazy to go on," he said. "Winter's about here. Do you want to go back while there is a chance?"

Michel glanced at him inquiringly. Curtis outlined briefly the situation as he saw it. Throughout Michel grinned. When Curtis had finished he laughed shortly.

"Oh, we make that Maguse lake like a ——," he said. "It only fifty miles. Then we find the woods and start back. One week and we go sliding by here right into Hudson Bay. The sea she froze, we just walk to Churchill."

"All right," said Curtis in relief. "We'll go on for three days."

It was not that Curtis believed Michel ignorant of their position. But he knew that fair play demanded that he give this man, who was following him so unquestioningly, an opportunity to turn back while he could. It was not until he had received his answer that he realized how much he desired to go on, to win his objective despite the delays, to show The Corner that he, too, could fight, could meet the odds in the old, old battle of man against the wilderness.

They paddled on for an hour. A waterfall forced a portage. Above it was a swift chute. Curtis took the tracking line and Michel guided the canoe. The river narrowed and the raging stream was filled with great boulders. Michel turned the bow sharply to avoid a rock. The current swept the canoe out.

Curtis was on a shelving rock. The sudden strain on the line caught him unprepared. His feet went out from under him and he slid into the water.

The bow of the canoe, released, swung straight out. Michel thrust in his paddle, only to strike a boulder. The next instant the canoe was upside down.

Curtis was swept down-stream a few yards before he could catch a rock and pull himself out. As he stood up the canoe, bottom side up, was at the brink of the falls. Above it, swimming desperately, was Michel. In the instant that Curtis stared the canoe disappeared. Then Michel shot out of sight.

As Curtis started to run he knew that it was hopeless. When he looked over the brink the black head was gone. An hour later he found the canoe in an eddy far below the falls. It was crushed beyond repair. And it was empty.

Curtis, exhausted by his run down the river bank, his clothing soaked, sat on a boulder. Snow began to fall. The short day was almost over.

Such, in brief, were the events of the Summer following his departure from the city. But as he sat there Curtis did not consider them. Nor did he consider the immediate future. His mind had focused upon that for an instant only, as a river steamboat's searchlight finds a white farmhouse on the bank, hesitates and then sweeps on.

Any seasoned traveler in the wilderness grasps instantly the significance of a disaster. He knows exactly the best and shortest route to assistance. He knows game and fuel and weather conditions, knows the best chances of finding natives. The instant after any sudden, unexpected collapse of his plans and hopes he has reviewed every contingency, every resource. He knows exactly where he stands.

Curtis had done this. As Michel and the canoe shot out of sight over the falls, he had summarized his equipment. One good knife. One waterproof match-box containing twenty-five matches. One outfit of clothing wholly inadequate for the Barren Grounds Winter that was now upon him. Nothing more. No weapon, no shelter, no food, no means of getting any.

Only an hour before he had outlined to Michel the chances of finding white men. Now, without a canoe, none of them was to be considered. In natives alone, Indian or Eskimo, could there be hope of salvation.

Curtis was exactly in the center of a strip of country two hundred miles wide and five hundred miles long into which no white man had gone since Samuel Hearne's first journey in 1770. Hearne had only wandered through with a band of Chippewyans, had never known exactly where he was, and he had not left information of any geographical value so far as this particular district was concerned.

In 1894 Tyrrell had skirted the western and northern boundaries of the unknown country, passing up on the Kazan and across to Hudson Bay on the Ferguson. To be sure, the maps showed many lakes and streams all about Curtis, even gave their names. But all had been drawn from Indian and Eskimo reports and matched where possible with Hearne's descriptions and charts.

It was because Hearne had been there at a time when only Chippewyans roamed the country, and Tyrrell had made his circle when the Indian no longer visited that section of the Barren Grounds, that the map was a blank so far as Curtis was concerned. He knew that the Eskimos, following the Chippewyans as they retreated to the new fur posts more than a century before, had gone far south, that some had even deserted the Arctic coast entirely and had made their homes in the Barren Grounds, living entirely on caribou.

But how far had the Eskimos come? Did they retreat to Chesterfield Inlet in Winter, or did they have favored lakes where fish were plentiful? Could they be found on the Kazan River or on Yathkyed Lake, or was there a possibility that some went east down the rivers to Hudson Bay? Did the fabled wooded area, the Barren Ground oasis, exist near Maguse Lake, and, if it did, would it not be probable that Eskimos were in it?

THAT was Curtis Baird's predicament. The map of the country was so vividly photographed in his mind he had only to shut his eyes to see it. One flash of the entire situation, and he understood it perfectly. It required no further consideration.

It was the reasons for facing this first disaster in his experience that Curtis reviewed. He blamed himself readily enough, but exactly why, exactly when, he had made his big error, he could not quite determine. He had left the city upon impulse but not in pique. Rather he had been mystified. His pride had been hurt but he had been frank enough with himself, and curious enough, to try to understand why he was not the success he had believed and wherein he had failed.

So he had wired to Michel and Joe, had gathered an outfit and started. There had come his first mistake. Always before he had taken some one else, some white man, some one who would be of use scientifically. He had traveled with a larger company, always with two canoes at least, with four or more canoemen.

That would have been the efficient way. He had always been efficient before. He had avoided disaster not because he was afraid of it but because it had seemed to be a duty to foresee its possibility and prepare against it. Only one canoe is wrecked at a time. No accident ever wipes out all the canoemen.

He knew he had erred when he had decided to go on without Joe. That had been the first tactical mistake. He remembered that he had realized it at the time, knew that he was taking an unwarranted chance. It was something unlike anything he had ever done before.

He had committed the second blunder when he and Michel had pushed on alone after the Chippewyan's death. He had criticized other expeditions for just such blundering obstinacy. But he had wished it to appear that he had not run from experience.

He arose, chuckled grimly, glanced down the river and then turned North, up-stream.

Stefansson may be right when he declares that an adventure is a sign of incompetence. But even Stefansson does not hold that it is a sign of a faint heart. Though Curtis Baird had never faced such a situation, though competence had safeguarded him from such things in the past, he did not bemoan his luck. The very matter of fact nature of his preparations for former expeditions had been due as much to a habit of straight thinking as to a desire for success, and he thought in straight lines now.

"I'm here. No equipment. No food. Winter's coming. There's no chance of getting to Churchill. I can't kill caribou. There are no snowshoe rabbits in the Barren Grounds. If there is an oasis there will be rabbits in it. I can snare rabbits. And I may find Eskimos there. It's a mighty slim chance, but it's the only one."

Neither, as he climbed the rugged slope of the valley through which the The-anni flowed, did he blame any one except himself. Possibly it is excusable in a man when he faces death. Undoubtedly it is only natural for him to feel so, for there are many petty things in human nature and a man at bay does not care what weapons he uses. If The Corner had not passed judgment as it did, Curtis never would have started North with only two men. He would not have been dependent wholly upon one canoe.

But he did not think of that. He blamed only himself, and yet he would have been more mystified than ever by the reception The Corner would have given him for that alone.

Instead of thinking of the past, Curtis settled its problem as best he could and then, single-minded as ever, devoted himself to the present. Once out of the river valley he found himself on a rolling, grassy plain, typical Barren Ground country. As straight north as he could determine it, he walked rapidly. He had not only to cover more than fifty miles with no chance of food but he could dry his clothes only by walking, and he could not sleep until his clothes were dry.

He pressed on. While he could still see he continually swept the horizon for smoke sign. After dark he watched as closely for a Mars-like star that would neither rise above nor fall beneath the horizon. It was not that he expected to see either. He simply could not overlook any possible chance.

When his clothes had dried Curtis kept on as before. He was not so tired as he had expected to be. Without his realizing it, danger was proving a stimulant. And as he reasoned it out, he could not hope to eat until he had reached the woods. Therefore, why put off the time by resting?

He walked all night and all the next day. He did not hurry and he did not rest. In the afternoon there was a slight weariness but he did not notice any weakness due to hunger. He was confident, too, that he had made forty miles, airline, since the night before, and in the later afternoon he searched the sky-line before him for the dark blur which would mean timber. To the left he could see what he knew must be Maguse Lake, stretching to the horizon. If there were timber it could not be much farther, most probably less than twenty miles.

Then, just at dark, Curtis came to a river. It was too wide to swim, too deep to wade. There was no drift wood with which to build a craft. The maps drawn from Indian reports showed two outlets of Maguse Lake, the Maguse river flowing practically straight east from the eastern side of the lake, and the The-anni, up which he had come, flowing from the southern end. This must be the Maguse river.

Directly north of where he stood, across this stream, were the places where woods had been reported. It was too dark for Curtis to see far. He only knew that there were no trees on the other bank. Perhaps along some stream farther on the oasis would be found. And in the oasis, if it existed at all, there was a possibility of finding natives, at least some small game.

Curtis had never considered what he would do if there were no oasis or if his own surmise about people dwelling within it or near it were incorrect. That possibility he kept from his mind, determined that he would not give thought to it until he was convinced that he must meet it.

He knew now only that he must cross the river. He turned to the left up-stream, because the river might grow smaller and thus increase his chances of effecting a crossing. He walked half a mile, came to a bend at the base of a hill, went around the bend and found himself in a skin-tented camp of Eskimos.

CHAPTER III

"THE DEER HAD NOT COME"

STRANDED, without firearms, food or canoe in an immense strip of country of which white men knew nothing, Curtis Baird had walked straight to a camp of Eskimos.

Yet as he stood there, exuberant in the thought that he had met and conquered the wilderness, he was asking himself the old question that had tormented him ever since he had started in search of the fabled oasis of Maguse Lake. He could not determine whether his success had been due to his own efforts or to a piece of marvelous good fortune. It is true that he had visualized the situation correctly, had determined upon the one chance of saving his life. But he had gained no new feeling, no new experience in doing it.

He recalled Brainerd's words about the man who has lost his life, or has come near losing it, in the land of adventure. He had nearly lost his. But it had brought no soul-stirring emotions. He was the same Curtis Baird, composed, cautious, far-seeing and efficient.

A dog barked and a man thrust his head out of the *topek*. Curtis shouted "*Kab-lu-na!*" and walked forward, his hands raised above his head.

Men, women and children swarmed out of *topeks* and stood in excited, chattering groups. When they saw that the *kab-lu-na*, or white man, was alone, some of them went forward to meet him.

Curtis knew that there was probably no race of people in the world who would have extended a more sincere and cordial welcome than the Eskimos. White men at home would have been suspicious, if of the rural type; uninterested, if of the city. Indians would have been sullen, silent, grudgingly hospitable.

But the Eskimos were not only sincere in their welcome but were ecstatic in their expression of it. Nothing that they could do for the strange white man was too much. They led him to the largest *topek* and placed a meal before him. This was exclusively of boiled caribou and was brought to him in a kettle, which Bruce recognized as having come from the Hudson's Bay Company.

It was warm in the *topek* beside the wood fire, and Curtis consumed a large quantity of the half-boiled meat. The food and the heat and his own weariness made him very sleepy. In spite of himself his eyes drooped and exhaustion lined his face.

It was typical of the thoughtfulness of his hosts that they saw this immediately and at once led him to another *topek* and prepared a bed for him on the ground. The last one was not out of the tent before Curtis was asleep.

The next morning when he came out of the *topek* he found the men awaiting him. They led him at once to breakfast. Their talk was continuous, but Curtis understood only a few words of it. He had mastered the trade jargon used by white men on the north coast of Alaska.

This had enabled him to use a few Eskimo words on his arrival. Consequently they had believed that he knew their language. After a time Curtis gave up the attempt to follow them and confined himself only to an effort to gather a few words which he would require later when he came to explain his predicament.

Soon after breakfast the occasion for this arrived. The men had not questioned him directly. Their own sense of politeness forbade this. But their curiosity was most evident and was most natural. From the first Curtis had dreaded this moment. He knew, from their firearms, that a few must have met traders at Marble or Depot Islands, perhaps had gone to Fort Churchill.

He knew the custom of gift making, the display of possessions and the wonderful stories that they must have brought back of the marvels of the white man's equipment. Now they had one of the members of this fabled race with them and it was only natural that, in their child-like faith, they would expect similar gifts.

His own sense of fair play made him feel the more keenly that his explanation could no longer be delayed. Haltingly he began the story of his journey and then by signs, words and gestures at last conveyed to them that he had come among them without firearms, food, boat, dogs, clothing, shelter or companions.

For a moment they received this information in silent astonishment. Then Aunah, one of the most important men in the tribe, spoke slowly so that Curtis might understand him.

"Stories have come to us," he said with many words and more gestures, "of the white men, the whalers on the Islands, the traders at Fort Churchill and even the white men who have traveled through the country far to the North.

"We have obtained many of the white man's things from our own people who trade with them. All of these white men were provided with everything which would make travel easy, food if the deer did not come, clothing to keep out the cold, boats and dogs to carry their things, firearms to kill their food. It has been told us that it was the custom of the white man to travel in this manner.

"Often we have talked about this. We have wished and hoped that such a one would come to us. We have heard that such a man made many presents in exchange for the things the Eskimo has. Now a white man has come to us, but he tells us that he has none of these things, that all he owns are the clothes he wears. It is new to our people to hear such a story. We must think about it. We are silent because it is all so different from anything we have yet heard."

When Aunah had finished speaking, Curtis went on in a vivid explanation of the tragedy at the falls of the The-anni. Instantly their faces brightened. Such a disaster was entirely comprehensible. Again Aunah undertook to be spokesman for them.

"This makes things different again," he explained. "The white man once owned such an outfit. He set out according to the custom of his race. Through no fault of his own he has come now, poor and starving, to our people. We were disappointed that he could make no gifts in exchange for meat, because the Eskimo is glad to have the things of the white man. We already have some of the white men's weapons and hope some time for other things. But that will not affect our welcome. We are glad to have our white brother with us. There will always be a place in our *topeks* for him and he will have food as we have food. Let the white man forget that he has nothing, as we shall forget it."

The speech, so full of simple friendliness, hospitality, and sympathy, warmed Curtis' heart as he had never thought it could be by the speech of a dweller in the Barren Grounds. Even the disappointment was that of a child and lacked entirely the avidity of the Indians farther to the south, who will take all that the white man has with no thought of return. He arose and silently grasped the hand of Aunah, because his voice was too husky to permit speech.

It was not only that Curtis' existence depended on the attitude of these people. That he had entirely forgotten in his admiration. Always before, in his relations with the primitive peoples, he had been the giver. Now he was destined to be only the recipient, and the recipent of favors extended with no thought of return. It was a new experience, something precious which had come to him.

Nor could he then bring up the subject which he had in mind. He had meant to tell them that while he had not trade goods there, he had many at Fort Churchill, and that he would pay them liberally if they would take him there. Now this seemed almost an affront at the moment. Later he would suggest this journey of four-hundred miles across the country. For the present he would accept in the spirit with which they gave.

But Curtis never made his request. The second night he was given a small fish for supper. The next morning he was given nothing.

By common consent he had become one of Aunah's family. Aunah was one of the older men and the most respected. There were no young children in his tent and consequently there was room for the newcomer.

After the first breakfast Curtis took his meals with Aunah's family. Though his share for supper was one small fish, he saw that not even Aunah himself had more. And the next morning there was nothing for any of them to eat.

CURTIS knew there were Eskimos who had deserted the sea and lived entirely on caribou, as they had once lived almost exclusively on seal and walrus. This was comparatively a recent migration, as in Hearne's time

Chippewyans roamed all the country as far north as Chesterfield Inlet.

The people Curtis had discovered probably had come to the Thelon for wood each Summer and found caribou plentiful. The Indians had departed to the vicinity of the fur-posts far to the south and west and gradually, timidly, the northern men had claimed the land for their own.

Curtis had heard, and now what he saw confirmed it, that these people lived exclusively on caribou. Though far up in the barren grounds, in a land in which there are no deer in Winter, they depended upon meat of the caribou alone. This meant the killing of great numbers of the deer in the Fall. Tyrrell had seen several hundred carcasses beside some camps on the Kazan river. This food supply, gathered when the great herds swam the rivers in the Fall, must last through the long Winter.

But nowhere near the camp could Curtis find the heap of rocks, surmounted by caribou antlers, which marked such a meat cache. The men were busy all day in laborious attempts to catch fish in the river.

The Eskimos, mercurial as they were, could not hide the truth by their lightheartedness when in his presence. Children were beginning to fret and cry for food. The women were overhauling the skin clothing and selecting the worn pieces for the pots.

Curtis carried the question to Aunah for confirmation.

Yes, he learned in substance, though the explanation was lengthy. The caribou had failed to cross the Maguse river at the camp that Fall. It had been incomprehensible. Ever since the oldest man could remember they had crossed there, coming down to the north bank in great herds, taking the water immediately, swimming out to the men waiting in their *kayaks* to be speared by the score, by the hundred.

Always, every Fall, they had come to this narrow place in the river, as they had always come to places in other rivers in the Barren Grounds, where other bands of Eskimos waited for them. From the skins came clothing and blankets and tents and *kayaks* and harness and lines, everything the people needed except fires for the *igloos*.

These they had gone without willingly; for were not their other blessings enough? It is not difficult for a man to live without fire to warm himself when he has an abundance of clothing and all the meat he desires. And frozen food is good for one. It chills at first, but in a few moments it warms the whole body as nothing from the steaming-pot can.

The people had waited confidently for the deer to come. When there were only a few stragglers, when no herds were sighted on the great, rolling plains of grass, fear first came to them. At last the time for the passing of the last deer had arrived, and they had obtained only enough meat for their daily needs. Scouts were sent out, but all returned without having seen the great herds.

No one could understand it. The signs had been right. They had violated no *tabus*. It had never happened before. And now Winter had come. They were in a land where nothing lived except an occasional fox or wolf. They faced the long season of darkness and cold without food. The dogs were dying at a time when they should be fat for the Winter. The children were beginning to cry. The women were boiling bits of cast-off clothing. There were barely enough skins for the new suits so necessary for the Winter. Soon they could catch no more fish. Then the end would come, slowly, but surely. In the Spring there would be none of them left.

It was difficult to think of this. They had done nothing to displease any one. The *arng-ek-kos* had always been efficacious in their intercourse with the spirits, and these medicine men were favored with unusually potent representatives in the occult world. But the deer had not come.

The deer had not come.

Nothing else was thought of in the camp, after the novelty of Curtis Baird's arrival had worn off. Nothing else was discussed in the *topeks*, among the fishermen on the river, among the women poking at the tough deerskins in the bubbling pots.

The deer had not come.

In those five words were contained the story of a tragedy that civilized people, even beneath the shadow of a world war, could not know. Belgium's story holds more varied horrors but could never have the completeness of "the deer had not come." Alone, unknown, unsung and unpitied, these people, as human, as mortal as you and I, faced extinction.

It would not be a swift, merciful, unexpected cataclysm. It would not be a condition which brave men could meet with hope of success. It would be a destruction complete, unavoidable, cumulative. The end would always be in view, yet it would come slowly, mockingly, battering down the hope and courage with which all men are endowed.

The children would be the first to go, failing to understand to the end, begging for food. Then it would be the women, crushed as much by their mental suffering and the impotency of their sacrifices as by starvation, fighting on to the last with the hope that some last act might bring salvation for those they would leave.

It was the first time Curtis Baird had ever come face to face with a tragedy so unthinkable. At first he did not consider his own fate. He was crushed by that of the people who had welcomed him so generously. He remembered the first meal he had eaten, bounteous, unstinted, given so ungrudgingly.

He felt of the complete Winter outfit of clothing which had been presented to him so impulsively. Tears come to his eyes when he recalled how exactly Aunah had divided the last fish and had smiled as he had passed the white man his portion.

As real as death seemed, as certain as destruction impended, Curtis could not conceive his share in it. He felt like an interloper, like an eavesdropper— was oppressed with the sense that he had intruded upon something sacred. He had sought these people for the aid they might give. They had welcomed him, had given all that they could, had in no way resented his presence.

With a courtesy so human it is found only among those whose primitiveness is untouched, they had even refrained from letting him know in that first day of the fate that darkened the camp. Not only had they given of their vanishing substance but they had successfully veiled their fears that his welcome might be complete.

Curtis had seen many Eskimos, many Indians, in the far North, but always they had meant to him only something of scientific interest, subjects to be studied, or a sheet anchor to windward if provisions ran low.

Now he saw them as fellow men, simple, sincere, courageous, more kindly than he had known men could be. He saw that the things he had been interested in, the things he had studied in them, had been surface features and manifestations. He had looked for ethnological facts and had forgotten that he was studying men.

A wave, not of compassion, but of comradeship, swept over him. He looked upon these skin-clad, meat-eating "savages" as brothers, as men and women who, at the bottom, were not different from himself. In fact, rather than welcoming them upon an equality, he sought admission to their ranks, wondered if he possessed those qualities which made admission possible.

"Aunah," he said, "I came to you with nothing. I came seeking aid. You were generous. You gave what you had. The deer did not come. My skin is white, but we are all men. I want to be a man with you. I have no gun, but you have. I am strong and can hunt far. Let me help."

Aunah grinned happily. Awkwardly he took the hand Curtis extended, for he knew nothing of civilized man's method of sealing a pact. But something in Curtis' grip told him what it meant and he grinned again, this time gently, understandingly.

"We knew you were one of us," he said.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIGHT

FOR three days Curtis Baird battled with the fate that was impending. With a rifle and a small amount of ammunition he scoured the barren grounds.

The first night he returned with nothing. The second he staggered in at midnight with a small deer which he had carried for five miles. The third night he did the same. While he was away each day the Eskimos fished. The two deer and a few fish were all the band of thirty people had to eat in that time.

The fourth morning they wakened to find a blizzard raging. Hunting was out of the question. The men could not even go out to their nets and lines. Curtis remained all day in Aunah's *topek*. No one ate.

It was the first day of Winter, that early October morning, and as Curtis sat beside the silent members of Aunah's family he felt more forcibly than before the tragedy that these people faced. The spell of his first talk with Aunah was still upon him. He was still determined to remain and to fight with them. But the day of shivering, hungry waiting in the *topek* served to bring to him in more vivid delineation than ever before a realization of the many days of silent, brooding waiting that lay before them. Strangest of all, this created no thought of separating his fortunes from those of this band of kindly people who had welcomed him.

His decision had been arrived at by a mental process entirely foreign to him. Always before he had weighed and measured definite, tangible things, had arrived at his conclusions by straight thinking, had discarded entirely that which was visionary. Now for the first time in his life he was being governed by emotions. It had not even occurred to him that there was nothing else for him to do. Equipped as he was, to have set off alone across country would have been only to invite starvation. Even had he borrowed one of the rifles, the small amount of ammunition which the Eskimos had would not have taken him safely out of that desolate land.

Nor had it occurred to him that his fate was as certain as theirs. Starving times had been the heritage of the people of the arctic and subarctic regions. He had become familiar with it in stories of this people, even had been told of it by natives who had gone through such an experience. Seldom had famine come to white men, and then only in heroic instances which shocked by their very strangeness.

So he had not realized that such an end could be for Curtis Baird, he with a white man's resourcefulness and a white man's ability to fight against heavy odds. But as the blizzard raged some conception of his position came to him, and for the first time he began to reason.

Therein lay the difference between the Eskimo and the white man. The native would never be daunted by exertion. He would be willing to do anything to feed himself and his family. He would hunt and fish night and day. But he lacked entirely the mental qualities which would make him a reasoning fighter against adversity.

All their lives the Eskimos had been the unquestioning victims of their environment. Now they had already accepted the fate which impended. The deer had always come before, had always crossed the river at this spot. No man could remember when they had not done so. This year they had waited, confident of the Winter's supply of food. But the deer had not come.

To the Eskimos it could mean only one thing. There were no deer. Always before they had come this way. So there could be no deer to make the great migration. And if there were no deer there would be no use to go to the crossings on the Kazan River to the north and west. They would only find other bands of Eskimos waiting as they were waiting.

Had not the deer they had killed been easily frightened? Had they not been thinner than ever before? The men could assure Curtis that the fat on the rumps had been only an inch and a half thick, whereas it had been two or three inches in the past.

Did not the *kab-lu-na* understand what that meant? Something had destroyed the deer. The few which had come to the Maguse River had escaped destruction. They had run far, had run themselves thin. They were afraid of the fate that had come to the other deer.

The few caribou that did reach the woods far to the south would be eaten by the wolves and wolverenes in the Winter. The next Summer there would be no deer to go north again. And without the deer how could the Eskimos expect to live? The end of their people had come.

At first Curtis only listened. He was still having trouble when they talked rapidly, but he was quickly grasping the language, difficult as it is, and also becoming better able to make himself understood. As he sat in the *topek* that first morning of Winter he turned the situation over and over. His white man's brain refused to accept the wholesale destruction of the caribou herds, of the thousands and hundreds of thousands of animals that roamed the great Northland. His white man's spirit refused to accept his fate without a struggle.

Though Curtis had no map he was able to sketch every river and lake as it had been charted from Indian reports by the Dominion Geological Survey. He could understand why the Maguse would furnish such a crossing for the deer. It flowed almost straight east, barred the way from the coast to Maguse Lake. To the northwest the Kazan River offered a similar barrier and there, above Yathkyed Lake, was Pallelluah, the deer-crossing place which Samuel Hearne had visited, and where Tyrrell had found vast herds of caribou crossing more than a century later.

Curtis knew there was some good reason

for the failure of the caribou to come to the Maguse crossing. But he did not believe it was the extinction of the great herds. He knew that the unusually early freezing of a river, the shifting of the wind to a quarter from which it was rarely prevalent, the absence of feed because of extraordinary weather conditions, might change the route of the deer's migration. Any one of these things was possible. Any one was a most probable cause.

LIKE any intelligent white man who goes into the North country, Curtis had found flaws in the natives' reasoning and opinions about many things. He had come to believe, for instance, that there was no great, regular migration of the caribou legions to the north in Summer and to the south in Winter. He had found too many exceptions to the rule. He had found deer in places and in seasons where no one had ever believed they could have been, and he had come to the theory, hinted at by other explorers, that the deer travel as the wind blows.

Every hunter knows the caribou travel against the slightest breeze. So long as the air is in motion they keep on, stopping only to feed or sleep for an hour or two. Feed also enters into the question and there is no denying the fact that the cows go to the arctic coast, and to the islands beyond, to drop their young.

But Curtis did not believe that there is any foundation for the common belief that all caribou go south to the woods in Winter and north to the arctic coast in Summer. There are so many exceptions that such a hard and fast rule of migration crumbles.

Why, Curtis reasoned, would it not be possible to move westward and find that the deer were passing there, or had passed? Would it not have been possible for some weather or ice conditions to have held the deer back or to have turned them far away? Was it not probable that the course of the prevailing winds had changed in the Summer or early Fall? A week or two of such a thing would afford an explanation.

"Aunah," he said, "have you and the men hunted on the west side of Maguse Lake?"

"No," was the answer. "The deer have always come on this side."

"But perhaps they went that way this year or are going south there now."

"That can not be. The deer have always crossed here."

"And you haven't looked on the other side of the lake?"

"Why should we? No man can remember when the deer did not come down on this side."

Curtis argued at length, presenting various theories. None had any effect. Aunah, like the others of the band, had never traveled far. His opinions were based upon observations confined to a comparatively small district, while the caribou herds extended across the continent. There was the added suspicion of the *kab-lu-na's* knowledge. He had never been in the country before. What should he know of the deer? Aunah had seen them cross at this place since he was a child.

But Curtis argued patiently throughout the day and at night had gained his real objective—Aunah's consent to go with him the next day to the other side of Maguse Lake.

In the morning they started overland to the lake and there took the easy course on the newly formed ice along the shore. As no Eskimo will go on a journey without his women, Aunah's wife, daughter and son accompanied them.

For two days they traveled without having anything to eat. This was what Curtis had dreaded. He had realized that Aunah's consent to the journey had been won against his own wishes and his judgment. He knew that if success were not forthcoming soon they would refuse to go farther. Then, at the head of the The-anni River, they caught a few fish. These were divided with the dogs, and with their own hunger unsatisfied they struck out the next morning straight across the Barren Grounds.

There had been a heavy fall of snow but it was still soft. The dogs had to be aided by the men and women and progress was slow. At the end of the first day one of the dogs died from starvation. Aunah stopped in helpless stubbornness. It was useless, he said, to go farther. Curtis argued and pleaded and at last obtained a promise from Aunah to meet him at a lake to the northwest. Then he struck out ahead, carrying a deerskin robe, a rifle and a third of the ammunition.

Traveling swiftly all day, despite the weakness which hunger had brought, Curtis was able to gain a sight of the lake before night. And before darkness came he found the broad trail of a band of caribou. They were going south.

Trotting in the well-beaten path, he kept on through the night. At daylight he found the deer, a thousand or more gathered closely in a valley. In an hour the last of his twenty shells had been fired and fifteen of the deer lay dead.

The caribou fled, the mass rolling over the swells in the white prairie like the black shadow of a fast-flying cloud, and at their heels lingered a half-dozen wolves sniffing the blood scent in the air. Curtis butchered his meat, spending much of the day at the task. He did not waste an ounce, not even the blood of those animals in which it was still flowing. He saved even the half-digested moss in the stomachs.

When night came he turned back. He was confident the wolves had gone on with the herd. Others might come, but it was a risk he must take. Though he had not slept for two days and a night, he trotted across the barren waste until morning, when he saw Aunah's camp to the westward. That night they were all gathered about the deer.

After a rest and a meal, Curtis took control. For the moment the Eskimos were satisfied. There was enough to eat. They were tired. Perhaps there would be more deer.

BUT the white man was as obdurate as success had made it possible for him to be. He loaded Uliu, Aunah's son, with a back-load of meat and sent him to the camp on the Maguse River with the news that the deer had passed to the west of Maguse Lake. He loaded the sledge and sent Aunah back on the same trail with orders to cache the meat on the bank of the The-anni at its head. The women, he insisted, must remain to keep the wolves and wolverenes from the meat that was left.

Then, with more ammunition, Curtis started westward again. As before, he was going in the one direction which would lead him still farther from fur-post or whaler. He had no reason to believe there might be deer there beyond the fact that he had already killed them in that direction. He was going straight into the Barren Grounds, into the north, into the implacable Winter, but none of these things occurred to him.

Finding the deer had aroused within him a determination that the Eskimos should not starve. He had pointed the way. He had taken the first steps for the rescue of the starving band. Now more than ever he must keep on, must do all that he could to instil courage and hope in these people.

There was hope, he knew. The deer were moving southward. Less than one hundred and fifty miles from where he had found them lay the shelter of the woods. Curtis even had a vision of leading the arctic people to the timber, into the land of their hereditary enemies, the Chippewyans. There they would find caribou, rabbits, ptarmigan and lakes in which there were many fish.

It was a daring thing to do, taking a people across the Barren Grounds in Winter. It was a difficult thing to do, for the south holds only terrors for the northern men.

But Curtis determined upon it, and the first step, he knew, must be the gathering of as much meat as possible where he was.

A second time he found a herd and again he was maddened by the meagerness of his supply of ammunition. He sought the best cover, chose the most strategic position, aimed as though his life depended upon each shot, but with fifteen cartridges he was able to down only eleven deer.

Again he spent the night on the back trail and at daylight found the Eskimo women at the meat cache. He ordered Ahlangyah, Aunah's wife, to go to the place of the last kill and guard the carcasses of the deer while he lay down to sleep.

In midafternoon he was wakened by Aunah, who had returned from making a cache of meat for the band at the head of the The-anni River. Though it was only an hour of sunset, Curtis immediately arose, took his robe and some meat, demanded of Aunah the last of the ammunition and started again in search of deer, this time going straight southwest.

Again Curtis found deer. It was a small herd, he had only ten cartridges and there were no sheltering ridges. He killed four. After he had dressed them he lay down and went to sleep.

The next morning he returned. Men with dog teams had arrived at the place of the first kill and Curtis sent two of them after the four deer killed the day previously.

As he had expected, he found the men willing to work. They marveled at finding caribou where they had not believed caribou were to be found. But they accepted the meat as evidence and, spurred by the thoughts of starving women and children behind them, urged their tottering dogs on across the Barren Grounds.

That night the first of the straggling village began to come in. Men, women and children were harnessed to the sledges. Family after family arrived, its members dashing like wolves at the pile of meat, eating it raw and frozen until they could hold no more. By morning the last had arrived and the meat was nearly gone.

That day the sledges brought in the other deer Curtis had killed. At the *kab-lu-na's* suggestion the best hunters accompanied him, leaving the others to haul in the meat. The women put up the tents, burrowed beneath the snow for moss for their fires, and the village was established there, far out on the great white prairie.

Curtis and his companions scattered far. Like a fan they spread out, those on the right going straight west, those on the left straight south, those between covering the intervening ground.

IN THREE days they were back. Two had killed deer. The others had seen only old tracks. Curtis immediately urged that the camp be moved southward. The meat he had killed was about gone. The hunters admitted that the tracks they had seen were pointing toward the south. They admitted that hundreds, thousands, of deer had passed in that direction.

But they would not go on. It was south. Indians lived in that direction, inside the border of the forest, in the place where the caribou spent the Winter. There was a possibility that they might starve in the North. There was a certainty that they would be murdered by the Indians in the south.

In vain Curtis described the comfort of living in a wooded country, told of the rabbits and ptarmigan that might be snared so easily, of the many lakes in which the fish could not find room to swim. He pointed out that the Indians, in Winter, lived only in family groups, widely scattered, one man in a tent and each tent far from any other. He compared this with the group of six tents in which the Eskimos lived, with their eight able-bodied men and the women who could fight if necessary.

But nothing moved the Eskimos. The stories of this unknown *kab-lu-na,* told in a day, could not be true when they had known otherwise since they could remember. Had not some of their own people been killed by the Indians? Were not the southern people treacherous and savage, possessed of a lust for the blood of others?

"But you will starve here!" exclaimed Curtis in exasperation.

"No," answered Aunah, "we will not starve here. Our people came from the North. They once lived there in plenty on animals killed in the salt water. Some of them once lived in a land where caribou were to be found throughout the Winter, though they had been unable to kill them because they had only bows and arrows.

"Now, with firearms, we will return to that country and live as our ancestors lived. We will start at once. We may meet a wandering caribou or two on the way. In any event we can draw our light sledges and kill and eat the dogs."

Preparations for the northward journey were begun at once. Curtis, realizing what it would mean, strove with all his power to prevent it. He pointed out that his leadership had brought relief. He showed how his reasoning had led them to caribou. He insisted that they must listen to him, for had not he alone killed all the food the entire band had had for two weeks?

But it was the futile task that reason always has when it encounters ignorance. Curtis, either through his own experience or from reports of other travelers, knew that their only hope lay in the timber to the south. By forced marches they could make it from where they were. He knew what lay before them to the north. Three hundred miles airline it was to salt water at the mouth of Chesterfield Inlet. It was a barren country between, and there was no certainty of food at the end of the journey.

But his knowledge was doubted because the Eskimos knew nothing whatever of the land of which he spoke. It was outside their experience and, therefore, outside their comprehension. Against his dismal picture of what lay before them if they did as they wished they merely said:

"We know the land there. It is where we have always lived. We will find food. Nowhere else is there food."

It was maddening. Curtis lost his temper, was driven to insults by his fear of the fate they invited. But they only wondered at his outburst and remained serenely complacent in their assurance that to the north alone lay their salvation.

In the morning they started. When they went Curtis took his place in front of Aunah's sledge, a strap around his shoulders.

CHAPTER V

"THEIR LAST WINTER"

THERE was meat enough for the first day's march. The second morning the women only helped the dogs at the sledges. The men scattered on either side, scouring the great, white, empty plains for food. But when they came to camp at night they brought nothing. The second morning Curtis went with them as he had the first. When they returned the hunters' hands were again empty.

The third morning Curtis did not go out to hunt. When he had entered camp the night before he had seen that there were only five tents grouped together. Far back on the trail was a single black spot.

"It is Ishnark and his wife, Koomana," Ahlangyah said in answer to his question. "They are old, very old, and they have no children to help them. It is their last Winter."

Curtis spoke to Aunah about it. The Eskimo shrugged his shoulders.

"They are old," he answered. "It is their last Winter."

"Why don't you send your son or daughter to help them?" demanded Curtis indignantly. "Ahlangyah and I are enough for your sledge."

"The old always go first when our people starve," Aunah said.

Before daylight the men had gone, leaving the women to take down the tents, pack the sledges and go on through the day to camp at night as far as possible toward the northeast. Curtis took his sleeping-robe and started on the back trail. Ishnark's tent was a mile behind the others, and when he reached it he found that neither the old man nor his wife had risen.

"Come," Curtis said cheerfully. "The others are about to start for the day. I have no family. You have no sons. I will be your son and help with your sledge."

They smiled amiably and crawled stiffly out of their robes. Curtis tore down the tent and in a few minutes the sledge was loaded. Ishnark had two dogs, thin, weak and old like their master, and they were hitched to the sledge. Curtis also took a trace, leaving the old people to walk behind.

Before noon he had passed the women and their sledges. They wished to hurry as much as did Curtis, and they were even better equipped with dogs and children in the traces. But they lacked the white man's nervous energy and impatience. Necessity stung but did not quicken them. They toiled but as they had done on any other journey.

Curtis stopped early, for he had gained during the day, and the women pitched their tents beside Ishnark's. Late at night the hunters straggled in. One brought a wolf which furnished a mouthful only for each of those in the band.

The next morning the hunters did not go out until the women, by great effort, had gathered enough moss to boil the pots. Then the tents were taken down, part of them cut into strips, and these were cooked as long as the moss lasted. The softened leather was chewed and gulped until the last of it was gone. Then the men went out to hunt and the women hitched up the sledges and went on.

At night the hunters brought in a wolverene. They came early, for the men must build *igloos*. No moss was gathered for fuel. The fat wolverene was devoured, raw and frozen.

The next morning the rifles were lashed to the sledges and the men took their places in the traces.

"There is no use to hunt here," Aunah explained to Curtis. "There are no deer. There is nothing. We will help the women and arrive sooner."

For two days the march continued steadily. The smaller children became so weak they could not keep up and were hauled on the sleighs. The last of the *topeks* had been eaten and that night a dog was killed and divided among all the people.

After the *igloos* were built each night there were no friendly gatherings. Each family crawled into its snow-nest and crowded together for warmth. Ishnark was too feeble to build more than a low, cramped hut and Curtis could not build at all, for only an expert can construct an *igloo*. In the low, damp, clammy interior he and Ishnark and Koomana spread their robes on the narrow snow bed and huddled together until morning. Then, without breakfast, the weary march was resumed.

Day after day it continued. Curtis marveled at the endurance of the human body. A steam-engine that would run on and on without fuel would have been less miraculous.

The cold had come, the fierce winds that burned the face and sapped the strength more swiftly than the toil. Nights were a relief only because sleep made them less dismal than the days. Mornings brought the nightmares. They arose, loaded the sledges, slipped the traces over their shoulders, kicked the dogs. Each movement was slow, listless, hopeless.

The weary march went on. It was no longer a compact cavalcade. For miles the line was strung out. Every little while a unit of it stopped. Dogs stretched out as if dead. Men and women sat, hunched over, upon the meager sledge loads.

THE hunger was not the continuous craving for food most commonly known as hunger, not the sort experienced when a meal is an hour or two late. The craving was not of the stomach. That seemed to have shrunk, to have become inactive, to have been the first part of the body which had abandoned hope. But from somewhere, from a place upon which no one could lay a finger, nerves carried messages to the brain, messages so imperative they brought panic at first, then, as the days passed, not a craving but a hope of food.

Curtis knew that men had often gone without food for a long time when on the Barren Grounds. He knew that Hearne had frequently passed through three, four and five day periods in which nothing entered his stomach, and that sometimes he had gone six, and once eight, days without eating.

He knew, too, that Indians and Eskimos starved to death, that entire bands had been wiped out. But always there had been merely curiosity, mingled with admiration, in Hearne's experiences, while the complete depopulation of an Eskimo or Indian encampment had been only an incident of the North, something to be expected in the lives of people who made it their home.

Now he saw it so close up, so vividly, so completely, became so much a part of it, not once during the day or even in the long nights could he get it out of his mind. The horror of it weighed more heavily upon him than his own sufferings. In fact, Curtis seldom thought of himself, of the cold, of the weakness, of the toil. As he watched that long, plodding, staggering line crawling across the white plains, like a mortally wounded snake making a last effort to reach its hole, he always remembered the Eskimos as he had first seen them.

It was a thought that kept his heart raw. Then, on the brink of disaster, knowing it, waiting for it, they had smiled and laughed, had offered comfort and condolences, had given unstintingly of their last stores. They had even kept from him the knowledge that they were certain of death.

Savages? Barbarians? These people with hearts so clean and open! These men whom Christ might have chosen for His disciples! These women in whom the spirit of motherhood was great enough to embrace any sufferer!

Often as he toiled Curtis cried out at the very horror of it. Something was wrong. The North had reared these people with the sternest discipline, with stinging lashes and stunning blows, with the black oppression of the long nights, and yet the North, insatiable and implacable, had failed utterly to crush out the most lovable of human qualities.

It had not even impaired them. Year after year, through unknown centuries, it had oppressed them, and yet they had remained cheerful, happy, kindly, sincere, more wholly human than those who have known only civilization can ever be. They were gentlemen and gentlewomen, and the breeding had come from within, not from without.

Yet the North was to conquer now, as it always did conquer in the end. The simple bravery of these people was to be crushed at last. Hope still flared within them, probably would until the end. But with Curtis there was no hope. He could see none. They hoped from instinct. Reason held him from that buoying quality.

His attitude as the days passed was rather that of a mighty revolt that proclaimed its own futility. He spoke to Aunah. The man's face was drawn, thin, deeply lined. His eyes were wide, staring, great wells of sorrow. Curtis would compare this with the full, jovial features of the man as he had first seen him. He remembered particularly the eyes as they had been lighted by the sincerity of his welcome, by the kindliness of a soul which knows only kindliness.

Whenever Curtis compared Aunah with the man he had known the revolt flamed afresh. Ahlangyah, too, aroused within him a passion of protest. She had treated him as a son in those first days, had mothered him, looked after his comfort. It was she who had suggested that he be given a suit of skin clothing without which he would have perished by now, and it was Ahlangyah who had made it. Now she toiled at the traces with the others, stooped, wordless, her head bowed as much by sorrow as by weakness.

Perhaps it was only the growing numbness that kept Curtis from some insane action. Wild ideas came to him but never did he have the strength to act. The very hopelessness of their position also weighed so heavily upon him he came to believe it was the very reason it was becoming so difficult for him to raise his feet from the trail.

PRIVATION is not a physical depressant alone. Cold, weakness, hunger, the dreary monotony of the Barren Grounds, all have their crushing effect upon the mind. Rather, perhaps, they act as an anaesthesia. Without conscious effort the steps come one after another, the strain is continued on the traces. The mind plods as do the feet. Its actions are as slow as the movements of the limbs. Its sensibilities gradually become deadened as the skin on the face is killed by the frost.

In the last day Curtis traveled thus. He remembered nothing of it. He was not even conscious of the others about him. He merely threw his shoulders against the traces and went on. Not until late in the afternoon was he aroused. A cry from Ishnark made him turn. Koomana was lying on the snow behind the sledge.

He ran back and with the old man's help tried to lift her. Ishnark's body seemed to crumple and he fell forward across his wife.

It was necessary for Curtis to muster the last ounce of his nervous energy to get the two bodies to the sledge. It left him weak, with perspiration frozen upon his face, and for a time he was forced to sit down. Then he got up, kicked the remaining dog to its feet—they had killed and eaten the other four days before—bent to the load on the sledge and crawled on.

That night Curtis begged a place for himself and his two aged companions in Aunah's *igloo*. Ishnark did not have the strength or Curtis the skill to build for themselves. Aunah granted permission listlessly. Perhaps he even forgot it the next instant. After the hut was completed they crawled in. Aunah was already asleep.

In the morning Ishnark and Koomana could not rise. Aunah did not seem to see them and he and his family made preparations to start as before.

"Will you help me drag them?" Curtis asked. "The other three can haul your own sledge."

"No," was the dull answer. "They are old. It is their last Winter."

"But they will die if we leave them here!"

"And they will die if we take them."

Aunah went on with his preparations. Curtis ran to the other men, asked help, begged them to wait until noon, when the two aged people might have strength enough to walk. But always the answer was the same.

"They are old. It is their last Winter."

Curtis argued, though without indignation or reproach. These men were no longer normal. There was in them only one thought, to go on. They had known starvation before, and they knew that the old and the weak were the first to fall. They knew that the case of Ishnark and Koomana was hopeless.

"Why should we weaken ourselves by dragging them that they may die a little farther on?" one man asked. "They will die anyhow. They know it and they expect it. They would not ask us to take them. Besides, we can not. Many of us will die before we can get food."

Curtis looked back at the *igloo* in which Ishnark and Koomana lay. All the other people were outside ready to begin the day's nightmare. One family had already started. Wearily, silently, heads down, shoulders bent to the traces, the men and women took up the day's march. The children, moaning piteously, lay on the sledges.

Not a word was spoken. Not a head was turned for a last look at the *igloo* in which two of their people remained. Curtis stared from the cavalcade to the snow hut. For the moment his mind was freed of the numbness of the last few days. He was completely alert, looked upon the situation for the first time from a detached point.

As he watched the departing Eskimos his admiration and affection were not diminished by the inhuman desertion. He did not blame them, but he cursed the North because it had finally driven the iron into their souls. His reason told him that they were right, that no other course was open to them. Their people had always done this. There was no wrong in it.

He wondered, too, if his own revolt were only a bit of mawkish sentimentality. He knew civilization could give these people, when they were normal, nothing that would heighten their humanness or increase their hunanity. Yet he knew that a civilized man in such a position would not go on. His kindness could not be greater than that of the Eskimos. Therefore, was the civilized man a fool if he stayed?

Curtis wondered, and yet he knew that he had already decided. He looked longingly at the cavalcade. The hope and the determination of the people might bring food before it was too late. And the Barren Grounds were a lonely place in which to die. It was true that Ishnark and Koomana were old, worn out by the struggle with the North. The end could only be delayed, never averted. And yet he turned back.

"I will stay with them," he said to Aunah as he passed him.

"Yes," said the Eskimo without protest or scorn or wonder.

He was past any of those things now. If he lived he would tell of the white man as a fool. Now he did not even understand.

"Good-by," Curtis called.

Aunah did not hear. He plodded on at the end of the procession of sledges, leaving Curtis standing at the door of the *igloo*.

CHAPTER VI

THE ANSWER

BOTH Isnark and Koomana were asleep when Curtis crawled in. At first he believed that death had come. A sudden exultation seized him, comparable only to that of the men in the death house when pardon comes. Then Ishnark mumbled something and Koomana twisted and groaned.

Curtis went outside where the dog lay. It, like its master, was too weak to rise. At any other time Curtis would have marveled at its endurance, would have praised its gameness. Now he seized it roughly, carried it inside the *igloo* and wakened the old people.

"I will cut the dog's throat," he told them. "Be ready to drink the blood when it flows."

He had to lift them from the snow bed, but the prospect of nourishment soon acted as a stimulant. First Ishnark buried his face in the fur and gulped the hot, spouting blood. Koomana took his place and when she had finished there was none for Curtis.

The blood gave them sudden strength and they clawed at the fur as if they would tear it loose and devour the meat while it still quivered. But Curtis dragged it away from them and went outside, carrying the dog with him.

A mile away to the south he had seen a thin, dark line on the snow. It was in a slight depression and he knew it meant wood, only thin, short, quick-burning willows, but wood, a fire.

It was two hours before he returned. The Eskimos were sleeping again and they did not hear him as he started a fire, dressed the dog and hung the kettle over the blaze. When the meat was only partly boiled he began to eat, slowly, chewing each bite until it disappeared.

Never could Curtis remember having exercised such restraint. Every nerve, his whole body, cried out that he should gulp, bolt, gorge, that he should fill his stomach until it was distended, until the dog was gone. It would have been the Eskimo way. It would have been the way of many white men.

But Curtis, now that he had chosen to remain with Ishnark and Koomana, did not intend merely to await death with them. He had not gone on with the others because he could not when these two were left to die. And now that he was there he could not let them die without a struggle. To fortify himself for that struggle he must consider food in the light of ounces, not pounds, must extract every possible bit of nourishment from it and not waste it by gorging.

When the meat was well boiled he took some of the broth and two pieces of meat and gave them to Ishnark and Koomana. It disappeared instantly, scorching their throats, and they clamored for more. Curtis shook his head and told them to lie down.

When they were asleep again he cut a hole in the snow bed, placed the kettle and all that remained of the dog in it, covered it over and went to sleep upon it.

It was dark when he wakened. He heard Ishnark and Koomana searching the *igloo*. He arose, built a fire, heated the kettle and gave them more of the broth and meat.

The effect was magical. Ishnark smiled and arose from his seat without difficulty. Koomana offered to superintend the cooking of the remainder of the dog, but Curtis insisted that he do it. Ishnark went outside and was gone so long Curtis wondered if he had fallen and was frozen to death. He did not like to go in search of him because he knew Koomana would devou the last of the dog if she were left alone.

Then Ishnark returned. He was greatly excited and for a moment he talked so swiftly Curtis could not understand him. Koomana punctuated his remarks with guttural exclamations and stared at Curtis.

"The others have gone, all of them," he finally understood the Eskimo to say. "The *igloos* are empty. They went away and left us, but the *kab-lu-na* remained behind, remained to die with us."

"But we won't die," said Curtis confidently.

"Oh, there is nothing else. There is no game and Winter has only begun."

"We'll find something, somehow."

"But why did you not go on with the others? It was foolish to remain and die with us. With the others there was hope!"

"It is not the way of the *kab-lu-na*."

"But it is our way. We do not blame them. All are starved and weak. They could not have helped us by remaining. We could not go on. They were wise in doing what they did. There was nothing else to do."

"But you are not going to die here," said Curtis. "We'll get a good many miles of travel out of this dog and we'll soon find something else to eat."

For an hour they discussed this single topic, Curtis still insisting that they would get food and ignoring the reason for his remaining, Ishnark and Koomana marveling at the rashness of a man who would sacrifice himself just to watch two old people die.

Finally the old man changed the subject. Perhaps the food was giving him strength. Perhaps the sacrifice of the *kab-lu-na*, though incomprehensible, was warming his spirit.

"Last Summer," he began, "I was fishing at the north end of the lake near which you first found us. It was at the mouth of a little river that comes from another lake to the north. Fish were many there. Koomana and I caught more than we or our dogs could eat.

"There was a rock in the river and it made the current narrow on one side, narrow and swift. The fish swam up there and we had only to stand with forked sticks and throw them out on to the bank.

"When it came time for the caribou to be crossing we went to our home where you found us. Before we left we piled the fish in a great heap and placed stones over them. If that place were not so far we could go there and we could eat the fish Koomana and I caught."

CURTIS knew of the lake to which Ishnark referred. It had been sketched on the map as lying directly north of Maguse Lake and only a few miles from it. He knew that all the lakes and rivers of the region were mapped only from Indian report, but even so rough and inaccurate a chart is of great value. Now Ishnark confirmed the topography of that particular section, while his own rough reckoning of their wanderings since he and Aunah had first started after caribou placed their present position at no more than a day's journey from the fish cache.

It was the first bit of hope that had come to them and Curtis acted upon it at once. He insisted that they all sleep. In the morning they would eat the remainder of the dog and he would go in search of the fish. It would not be so far but that he could get some and return. Then, fortified by the food, all three would journey to Maguse Lake.

Ishnark was the only one of the Eskimos who had not owned a modern rifle. He did have one of the trade guns issued by the Hudson's Bay Company, a muzzle-loader but admirable for the Indian's purpose. Curtis looked it over and Ishnark produced a fair supply of powder, caps and lead balls. It would do, Curtis believed, would be better than nothing, though he knew its range and accuracy were such that he would have to poke it between a deer's ribs to make certain of killing one.

But he was thankful even for this weapon, and he lay down with it beside him. He had just dropped off to sleep when Ishnark grasped his shoulder. He was awake instantly and in the complete silence he heard a slight scratching outside the *igloo.*

He knew at once what it meant and slipped quietly out through the long passage. As he stood erect beneath the stars a dark object dashed around the deserted *igloo* beyond. Curtis ran around the other side and fired his weapon from the hip.

Ishnark and Koomana both came running up as he leaned over the dead wolverene. Nothing could have been more acceptable than this, and all three took it as an omen of success. Most crafty of killers and thieves, this scourge of the Northland is always in good condition. Where men die and other animals grow thin, the wolverene rolls in fat. Fat is the greatest essential in the North and it was what Curtis and his companions needed more than anything else.

Now, with this meat to fortify them, they could look forward to a successful search for the fish cache. Divided, it would furnish enough fuel to keep Ishnark and Koomana alive for a few days and it would carry Curtis to Maguse Lake and back. Thankful this once for the thieving propensities that had sent the animal prowling about the deserted snow village, they went to sleep.

After being gone three days Curtis returned with another wolverene he had found robbing Ishnark's fish cache. He also carried some of the fish and with these meager supplies the three loaded the sledge and started southeastward.

It was in that direction that Fort Churchill, the nearest abode of white men, lay. Merely to be traveling toward it was a stimulant to Curtis, though he had no intention of going so far. For the present nothing in the world was so important as that cache of fish a little more than a day's journey before them, yet there was a psychological effect in the fact that they were not going farther north. North had come to mean only barrenness and cold and starvation.

They reached the cache in the middle of the second day. Ishnark built an *igloo* with Curtis' help. They made it large enough and also built a storehouse adjoining, and into this they carried the frozen fish the next morning. The cache had been robbed by wolverenes, Ishnark declared, and only half the fish he had placed there remained. But it was food, meant that death was cheated for the time, and the two old people smiled happily.

It was food, but such food as Curtis had never before eaten. The fish had been caught in the Summer and they had become half putrid before the frosts. Still, eaten in their frozen condition, this was not so noticeable, and Curtis found that they were nourishing and heating.

Ishnark and Koomana were now content to remain idle. There was food for the present and they were still weak. Curtis had killed another wolverene that had come to the cache, and there was enough fat for some time.

But Curtis, after resting two days and regaining some of his strength, began preparations for the next move. In two weeks the fish would be gone. By that time they must have more food. He began to question Ishnark about the country to the east of Maguse Lake.

"There are woods there," the old man said. "A man must travel fast all one day to pass through them. It is where our people get the materials for sledges and *topek* poles and the framework for the *kayaks.* It is only a day's journey from the place where the deer cross the river, the place where you found us."

"Then it can not be more than three or four days' journey from here," said Curtis.

"No more than that."

"And there must be rabbits and ptarmigan there, and may be a deer or two, and wolves and foxes."

"Yes, though only a few deer. But it is hard to kill them there. They hide among the trees. Our people seldom go to the woods except for that which they need. The rabbits and birds are small when there are so many of us and we have always had deer at the crossing."

So the first native report of the woods at Maguse Lake came to Curtis. At the time he hardly realized its significance. He did not even give a thought to the fact that he had been traveling with a band of Esquimos who knew of it, who had visited it, who had obtained their wood from it, and that the simplest question would long ago have brought him a knowledge of it. For it was no longer a discovery to be made, a bit of unknown country to be mapped, an exploration to his credit. It was now lifesaving timber. The Esquimos had been right. They could not have killed the deer. And even had they been able to, the small amount of game would not have fed the entire band for long. But it would more than care for the three. And Curtis believed that he could kill the caribou where they would fail. So he began preparations to go.

First he cut down the sledge so that it would not be so long or so heavy. He chose the best of the fish and set them aside for the journey. But his real task was in convincing Ishnark that in the woods lay their only hope. The old man's spirit had only flared when they reached the fish cache. Now he saw nothing except disaster.

"We are old and this is our last Winter," he said. "Why should we cross the white plains when we have food here? When this is gone we will go. It would be the same anywhere."

Through sheer persistency and not because of his optimism or cheerfulness, Curtis had his way. When only five days' food remained from the fish cache they started.

It was not a difficult journey. They had enough to eat. The surface of the snow was hard as ice. It was bitter cold, but when the wind blew it was at their backs and their exertions kept them warm. At night there was always the *igloo* and the caribou blankets.

AT THE end of the fifth day they came within view of the woods. The fish were all gone but Curtis did not mind. After more than a month spent on the great white plains the sight of trees was enough to gladden his southland heart. He did not expect to have the comfort of a fire, for they had only an *igloo*, no skin *topek*. The woods would not add to their equipment. They probably would even be compelled to camp outside its borders, for they could build an *igloo* only where the snow was packed and frozen.

But they were woods, stunted, twisted, queer-shaped trees, it is true, but woods nevertheless. Curtis looked at them, a black blur on the snow, and knew that he was the first white man who had ever seen this island of trees far up in a land where no trees are supposed to be. This is what he had left the city to find, and yet now that he had found it he learned that he had no trace of the explorer's elation.

Had his plans not been so completely upset by the loss of his canoe, had he made the intended journey to Maguse Lake, he would have found the reported woods and he would have returned with his story of the discovery. He would have added lakes and rivers to the map, would have changed dotted lines to definite, unbroken tracings. He would have charted another bit of the last unknown.

Yet as he and Ishnark and Koomana sat on the sledge and looked at the woods in the distance Curtis felt that here was a discovery he would never chronicle. He realized that he not only lacked the desire but that something had risen which absolutely forbade him to tell of what he had found. That forest, a tiny dot on the great, illimitable barren grounds, could never mean anything to the world, to geography, to science. It could hold only the passing interest of a few. Nothing in all the great world would be changed by the knowledge that it existed.

And yet to Curtis it assumed an importance far greater than that of anything he had ever heard of in the Northland. It was not only a clump of dwarfed spruce cut off from their fellows to the south, standing valiantly and alone in an endless battle with the blizzard and the frost, but to him it was a symbol of success, of a success he had never sought to attain by his journeys. He could not define it. He did not understand it. He only knew it was something that eluded his thoughts and could only be felt. He only knew that these were his woods, that he had conquered the North to win them, and that they should never be defiled by a map.

"Come, Ishnark," he said as he arose and took the traces. "We must go on. We are nearly home now."

THE next Fall Curtis went south from the Maguse River with the caribou. He followed at their heels, killing his food as he went, crossing the barren grounds to the timber and Fort Churchill.

At the deer crossing on the Maguse river he had left Ishnark and Koomana. With them were Aunah and a dozen others. They had come back to the only place they knew, scarred and twisted by the Winter, their souls blighted by the ordeal the North had imposed upon them. Not until the Fall, when the deer came again, did any of them smile. Curtis waited until their

Winter's meat was assured. Then, treading on the heels of the herd, he left them.

It was the end of February when he reached the city, after an absence of two years. For a week he did not go near the Explorers' Club. Then the very lonesomeness that only peopled places can cause drove him late one afternoon to the haunt of the men he had known best.

His reception was uproarious. Nothing except the greeting of the starving Eskimos had touched him like this. Gradually, from the tumult into which the club was thrown, he learned that he had long been given up as dead. Joe Le Garde had written to the president of the club a year before asking about him and telling of where he had gone. Since then there had been no word.

Gradually the handclasps loosened and the excitement died. A circle formed. Now for the story!

For the first time in his life Curtis found himself silent before these men whom he had so easily thrilled.

"Out with it!" they cried. "Did you find the woods? How did you get through that first Winter?"

"It wasn't much," Curtis answered hesitatingly. "I lost the Indian, then Michel, with the canoe and all the outfit. I found some Eskimos near there and spent the Winter with them. The next Fall I followed the caribou south and got to Churchill."

They plied him with questions but without obtaining more than short answers. At last they began to drift away, wondering, disappointed.

"He didn't find what he went after and he's miffed," one man remarked.

Curtis heard him, and he smiled.

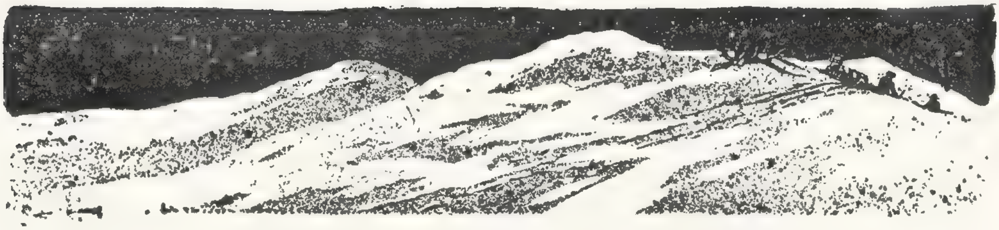
Then he looked up. Only a few remained. He saw that they were Brainerd, Tormey, Ryan, Williams and Macklin. He remembered vaguely that they had shaken his hand when he arrived and that they had not asked any questions. Now they stood about, watching him silently.

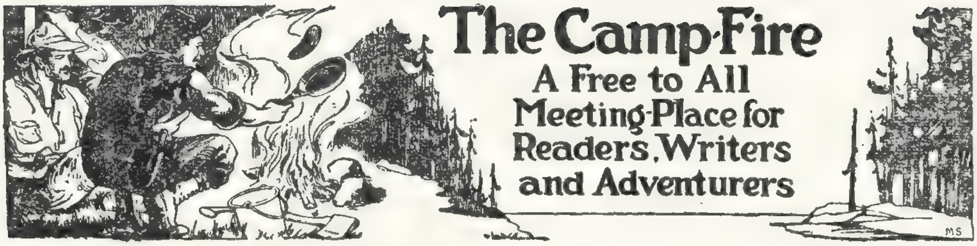
Then as one man they turned toward their fireplace, toward their own corner.

"Come, Curtis," whispered Brainerd as he took the younger man's arm.

They followed the others. Ryan and Tormey were dragging a chair forward. Williams and Macklin were rearranging the five chairs which had always stood in front of the fire. They moved them closer together and the sixth chair was placed in the circle.

Silently Brainerd led Curtis to it, and the other five stood until he was seated.





The Camp-Fire

A Free to All Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

QUITE a lot of us in Australia, New Zealand and Tasmania, and here's the good word from a comrade of the last named:

Red Chapel Avenue,
Sandy Bay,
Hobart, Tasmania.

Just a little skite from a Tasmanian "adventurer" who has emerged from the "armchair" and "fireside" stages. I will try to give you an idea of how things are going here from *Adventure's* point of view.

OF TASMANIA'S 26,000 square miles about three-quarters is settled, and about one-quarter (the South-West) is absolutely unsettled. Mention the district to a city-dweller here. He will look wise and patronizingly inform you of "the terrible bleak, bare, uninhabitable, barren, dangerous, etc., etc., western wilds. Newspapers ditto. The old-time explorers must have been very prosaic guys, or else the conditions damped their ardor. Anyway, recently a society has been formed —the National Park Board, which has got a reserve of 27,000 acres, at the "edge of cultivation, at the little border station where the trains run out and stop," to misquote Kip. National Park is supposed to contain every variety of flora and fauna peculiar to Tasmania. In her you get water-falls, fernery, gullies, mountains (or rather, a mountain plateau over 4,000 feet) and mountain lakes, which in time they expect to civilize enough to educate the locals and other tame tourists up to.

MY COBBLER and I have our "happy hunting ground" west of this park, with our jumping-off place at Fitzgerald, 6 miles past the Park Ry. station, and hike south-west. The last holding is 6 miles from Fitz. and the few settlers up to here unanimously agree that when the Deadheads (Government) wake up, they will get wise to the big timber and the mountain mineral country, then they will put a railway through to Port Davey (to a Hoburger, the last place God made), on the S. W. coast.

As far as we know, we are the only two genuine "adventurers" in Tasmania. Instead of grumbling at the wet weather (which is the real wet), we try to get used to the damp. On exploration stakes we have done a little in the original line, having located some falls on the side of one of those "inaccessible" mountains. Director of Tourist Bureau here wants us to take a party out to the falls (which we did not reach, but can locate, where others can't); and on an official report, will try to get a track made to them for the tame tourists.

RE E. C. ROSE'S remarks on Wabbles, they exist here too. There are several in the office where I have hung out for eleven months, and am chucking in March to go surveying. One of these snooped up to me one day when I was running my eye over a typewritten draft of an expedition which I was suggesting to Director of Tourists aforementioned. His piggy little eyes concentrated on the headlines "Proposed Trip to Mount Mueller." Without my permission, the snoop starts to pore through its specs at the draft, while I look down with pity at this smug insect of five foot nil. When it finishes, its first remark is that I have in one place got down "sae level" instead of sea level. Then it looks up, and tries to sneer.

"H'm, you'll be quite an explorer some day," it sniggers.

"Uh-huh!" I grunt, not wasting words.

Re exploration generally, it said: "There's nothing left to explore now, except a little bit of South America."

To this whine, I orated that there was exploration right here in Tasmania, even in the city's back yard. It does not believe me, for does it not say in the official records such and such? And these archives can not lie.

OSMIRIDIUM here boomed a lot last year, and mining generally seems to be keeping its end up, and now a few prospectors are beginning to get out into fresh country. The Government has announced its intention of appointing a Conservator of Forests, somewhat on Californian lines. Perhaps they will, some day.

If you know of any adventurers ever likely to butt in on this isle and wanting to know where to hike to, you could get them to drop a line to either myself, above address, or to my mate J. F. Murray, address 20 Lord Street, Sandy Bay, Hobart, Tasmania, and we would only be too glad to put them on to anything. There are kangaroos, wallaby, badger to get in the wilds, fish stocked at Lake Pedder among the mountains, and now forgotten; there are hundreds of mountains to climb, rivers, lakes, forests, button-grass plains to traverse, panoramas to sketch for artists, volumes for photographic enthusers, little known tracks and shacks, a real miniature paradise.—S. H. LIVINGSTON.

OLD-TIMERS of the West, can any of you shed light on this man Adams and this lost mine?

———, New Mexico.

Can some of the old-timers write me something concerning a certain man named Adams, who originated in California, freighted across the

U. S., was robbed by Indians and finally fell in with a number of men, partly soldiers, and with them was led by a Mexican guide to a very rich gold mine which the Apache Indians had hidden in N. W. New Mexico.

ACCORDING to the best information obtainable, after the party was working in mine Apaches rushed them and killed all in party. Adams and man named Davis were gone looking for party coming bringing chuck for outfit but found them killed also.

Adams and Davis walked from mine to a certain landmark I have located and hid. Saw several Indians pass hunting them. Adams and Davis finally reached Ft. Wingate, where Adams seeing some of the Indians who were in the massacre party, promptly shot them. Hid out for several years and when able to try to return could never follow his trail back to the noted hidden mine.

Victoria, who used to be chief, once offered to take a party to this mine for 100 horses. Party got afraid of Indians and broke up.

It has always been claimed that the Apaches were the only Indians who knew the trail to this mine and always killed any whites coming from there.

Supposed to have been 54 years since Adams was at this mine. One other white man has been there and come back alive, a doctor from Albuquerque, N. M.

Any information about this sent in to Camp-Fire will be greatly appreciated.—M. M. COLEMAN.

HERE'S a sample letter from a sample wanderer:

San Francisco.

I've just finished making a three-year "bumming" tour around the world, touching at England, Egypt, Gallipoli, South Africa, Tasmania, New Zealand, Australia, Tahiti and Hawaii and here I am back in California.

FROM Los Angeles to New Orleans was the first leg of my journey, which I covered in about three weeks *via* the underneath method on passenger trains. Two weeks I stopped over at El Paso, the gambling-houses, race-track and odd characters hanging around being the attractions. From New Orleans to England on a lumbering old mule boat. Passage in twenty days; net proceeds six pounds and a fine collection of cooties. I had left New Orleans with a nickel. Then I made a trip as third baker on *S.S. New York* to New York and back to Liverpool to fatten the bank-roll a bit in order to take in London. Arrived in London with eleven pounds odd and roamed the highways and byways of that grand old city for nearly two months. When broke, I took job as assistant cook on troop ship *Minneapolis*, visited Alexandria, Malta, Gibraltar and Gallipoli, then back to London.

A month later I shipped as second cook on the *Kia Ora*, touched at Dakar, Africa, Cape Town, Hobart, Tasmania and Auckland, New Zealand, where I deserted. Worked there as barman for several months, when, in the war registration, the irregular method of my arrival in the country was revealed to the authorities which resulted in my spending a few weary months in their modern and sanitary gaol. Upon my release, I hopped over to Sydney, Australia, spent nine months there and landed back in California on *S.S. Sierra*, working as second butcher. Five times I attempted to enlist in the British Army. Three times refused because I was an American and twice on the grounds that aboard ship in some capacity was doing a bit and was told to continue in that game. Perhaps you have no idea with what suspicion and prejudice an American was looked upon in England in 1915-16.

THE morning after a Zeppelin raid in London the police visited my room in Camden Town to ascertain whether I had any means of flashing signals out of my window. It seems some time previous a German had been caught in the act of using a mirror and strong light to flash signals and always after that all foreigners were under suspicion. Especially Germans, Belgians and Americans. Yes, sad to relate, many Belgians both in England and Belgium assisted or attempted to assist the enemy.— —— ——.

THE spirit of adventure, biologically speaking? Here's another definition to be added to our growing collection:

Baltimore, Md.

"The spirit of adventure, biologically speaking"—well, it is my impression that, biologically speaking, "there ain't no such animile" as the spirit of adventure.

To my mind the spirit of adventure is not a primal motive force or intention, or anything else of that sort; it is an emotion and pre-supposes a certain amount of mental—if not physical also—detachment from the self-preservation propagation of the species.

I would say that the spirit of adventure is that curiosity that will not be satisfied without knowing from first-hand evidence what lies around the turn in the road and what lies behind the distant hill. It travels always in an atmosphere of its own making; of glamour of romance that is none the less real because science with all of her wonderful apparatus is not able either to weigh it or measure it. And to be the true spirit of adventure, the whole must be bathed in the "light that never shone on land or sea."—C. R. MEREDITH.

SOME interesting words from Farnham Bishop about the facts back of his story in this issue. But how about this "no white man has crossed the San Blas country"? I've an idea that one man did. Who has the final facts? A good many have gone into it and been asked out or at least didn't get across. How about it?

Berkeley, Cal.

As you say, 1892 is a pretty late date for fictitious history. I didn't dare spring the real date: 1900. That year, there was an attempted revolution, a Scotchman at Las Cascadas, and a Colombian regiment wiped out at Matachin, very much as I have told in the story. The Scot—whose name was *not* Cameron—married a Colombian lady and their son told me of his father's exploits.

AFTER the Matachin affair, the Scotchman and his Indians skirmished with the Colombian forces up and down the line of the P. R. R. His proposal that both sides cease firing when the engineer of an approaching train whistled for "Time out" was made in all seriousness, and worked well in practise. His capture of the fort on Monkey Hill, and with it the city of Colon, was also done substantially as in the story.

Then, with his native allies—who were a much more decent lot than the *Sosa* and *Pedregal* of my story—he laid siege to Panama City. The United States naval officer protecting the neutrality of the P. R. R. insisted that the attack be made at a prearranged time, after the rolling-stock had been moved to the far end of the railroad yard, which lay between the insurgent position in the suburb of Calidonia and the Colombian barricade at the head of the Avenida Central.

ACCORDING to the Scotchman's son, his father's advice was disregarded by the native members of the insurgent council of war. They decided on a direct frontal attack against barbed wire and machine-guns. The attack was repulsed with great slaughter and the Colombians regained their control of the Isthmus for three years longer.

The San Blas, I believe, had gone back to their own country before that. They had fought for the Scotchman on a cash basis, like American or European soldiers of fortune; also, because he had dealt fairly with them and won their esteem, and finally, because they have never forgotten the treaty of alliance made between the San Blas and the Scotch colonists in Darien at the end of the seventeenth century.

Fever, famine, and the jealousy of the British East India Company brought the Scotch colony, as *Cameron* said, "to an ill end." You can read about that in the history books. What strikes me as more suitable for the "Camp-Fire" is to mention the intangible thing that helped make those San Blas fight for the plantation-owner, and that is the affinity between Scotchmen and Indians. Did you ever hear of a successful Hudson's Bay factor who wasn't Scotch? An Indian said to a friend of mine: "The Scotch are our brothers; they dance like us, and their music is like ours."

BUT because an adventurous war-party of San Blas bucks were willing to fight for a Scotch friend, do not imagine that a Scot, or any other white man would be tolerated in the San Blas country today. No white man has ever gone through it, from Panama to South America, overland, at any period of history. No white man has crossed it from ocean to ocean, by the route Balboa followed four hundred years ago, since a detachment of United States marines and bluejackets marched across there in 1871. There is a thorough understanding between the tribal authorities and the Governor of the Panama Canal, and any armed party of adventurers bent on entering the forbidden territory will be turned back by the Zone Police.

Of course, you can buy a timber or mining concession from the native authorities, either in Bogatá or Panama City. Selling such "scraps of paper" is one of the best things they do. Nominally, the San Blas country is a part of each of the two republics of Panama and Colombia; actually, it is an independent buffer state between them. Neither of those countries has any more real authority over the San Blas than Germany has over Belgium.

I know a man who bought a mining concession, went in, and struck it rich. Then, as he was sitting by his camp-fire, out of the night came silent brown men. Without a word they turned the cooking-pot and every other receptacle in his camp upside-down, and melted back into the jungle. That bit of symbolism, he explained to me afterward, meant that he was to go. He went.

THE San Blas are no weak and helpless "Wards of the Nation." They have plenty of Winchesters, machetes, and grit. Some of them are college-bred, more of them are able seamen. I have heard of them as far afield as Russia. "San Blas" is the name the Spaniards gave them; they call themselves the Tulé, which, like the word "Zulu," means simply "The Men." And they *are* men—up-standing, thoroughbred he-men. For more than four hundred years they have held their own against the white men, and I, for one, hope they may keep on doing so till the end of time.

WHEN I first went down to Panama in 1907 you could still see the old wooden signal-tower in the P. R. R. yards outside Panama City, riddled with bullet-holes during the attack made by the revolutionists in 1900. The American naval officer who umpired the battle would not let the fighting begin until the operator had had plenty of time to get down out of the tower. Rose, the American soldier of fortune who held the bridge over the yards with a machine-gun and broke the insurgent attack, was later a steam-shovelman in the Culebra Cut.

Here is the exact dope on the treaty:

From Chapter V of "The History of Caledonia: or, The Scots Colony in DARIEN, In the West Indies. With an Account of the Manners of the Inhabitants and Riches of the Countrey. By a Gentleman lately Arriv'd. LONDON: Printed and Sold by John Nutt, near Stationers-Hall. MDCXCIX."

"After the Colony had refreshed themselves ashore, and taken all possible precautions against any suddain surpprise, by such fortifications as could be made in so short a time; It was agreed on by all, that it would add much to the security of the enterprise, if they could enter into a League and strict bond of friendship with the *Indians*, whom they knew to be great Enemies of the *Spaniards*, who had endeavoured to extirpate them, but could never prevail, by reason of the invisible paths of the Country. Accordingly, some Deputies were sent out, among whom was *Mr. Paterson*, the chief Projector of the whole design. . . .

" . . . the Deputies . . . arrived in the King's presence, whom they found seated under a tree of an extraordinary bigness, upon a kind of a Throne made of several Logs of Wood, piled neatly one upon another, and covered with a sort of Party-coloured Cloth, which he had purchased from the Spaniards for a great Sum of Gold. He had on his head a Diadem of Gold Plate, about ten inches broad, indented at the top. . . .

"Then *Mr. Paterson*, the First of the Embassy, rose up, and after due reverence, made a short and pithy Speech; the substance of which was, *That they were come from the Uttermost Coast of the World, being the Subjects of a Mighty Prince, to admire his Grandeur, to establish Traffick, and to make a strict League with him against all Enemies whatsoever*. . . .

"Then, by his Majesties Order, a Noble *Indian* stood up, and made a speech, the substance of which was, *That the bearded Men were welcome; that there should be nothing wanting that they could possibly assist them in; that a League should continue while Gold and Floods were in Darien* (an expression used there to signify Perpetuity), *and that they might be assured of it the more, his Majesty would Swear it by his Teeth, and Touching of Lips with his Fingers.*"

THIS is the original version; the expression "While rivers run and gold is found in Darien" has been popular on the Isthmus and elsewhere since Warburton's novel "Darien, or the Merchant Prince" in the fifties.

If you use this in the "Camp-Fire," please don't let the proofreader abolish the lovely spelling and italics of the "Gentlman lately Arriv'd.' Speaking of spelling, the suburb outside Panama City where the last fight of the 1900 revolution occurred is called "Calidonia," with an "i" in the second syllable. This is Spanish spelling; of course, the "Caledonia" where the Scots settled was many miles away, in the San Blas country.—Farnham Bishop.

HERE'S another comrade who agrees, at least in part, with Earl J. Teets as to adventure not being adventure. After writing me the two following letters, though I had expressed no doubts, he sent me some documents establishing his position, giving me other lines upon his training and, incidentally, some interesting information on parachutes.

He speaks of fishing the Stillwater. So have I, for I was a country editor at Troy, Miami County, Ohio, for nearly three years. And I too grew up on family tales of the local Indians, my great-grandfather having laid out what is now Columbus in 1797. It was on his grounds that General Harrison persuaded the chiefs not to join in Tecumseh's rising, and Indians were every-day features of my grandfather's younger days.

AIRPLANES. As they come into general use what are they going to do to adventure's last frontiers? Regions now inaccessible, or accessible only with extreme danger and difficulty, will become easily reachable in a few hours. What jungle so remote that you can be sure you won't, after fighting your way into its depths, be whacked on the head by an empty beer-bottle jauntily heaved overside by some fellow floating by in an airplane?

Lancaster, Pa.

This is J. J. Coughlin, talking, Inspector of Aeroplanes, for the Navy, now down here on temporary duty.

I've had a balloon burn, while half a mile above the ground; came down in parachute. I've had a balloon burst wide open from top to bottom rope; used parachute. The rip-panel blew out of a war-kite, letting the gas out; used parachute. On night patrol, with no lights, in dirigible, over the sea, motor stopped, compelled to drift with wind to uncertain landing, knowing that to land in rough sea was bad enough, but with a two hundred and forty pound depth-bomb loaded with T. N. T. hung under the fusillage, landing at night on the ground was not to be thought of.

OR, HAVE the motor of a sea-plane commence missing fire, when you know the flying-boat will never live in those waves. Or, and the worst ever, be in basket of a war-kite that is being towed by a vessel and have the kite start diving, ending in looping the loop and find yourself and basket sitting on top of the kite.

But I've had no adventures.

When I want thrills, I buy a copy of *Adventure* and read an Indian story by Hugh Pendexter. Where in the world does that man get his Indian dope? I want to know because I wish to purchase a work on the Indians who inhabited the Northwest territory when Mad Anthony licked —— out of them. "Red Sticks," in Mid-September issue, was exceptionally interesting to me, because I was born on the Stillwater Creek mentioned, and as a boy fished the Stillwater for bass, from its source north of Ansonia, Ohio, to its mouth at Dayton, and there are good bass in it yet.

MY MOTHER'S folks were the first French settlers in Darke County, then called the "Black Swamp." Mother has told me that of a night her folks could see from their cabin door the camp-fire of Indians. This was of course after 1795 and the Indians had learned their lesson as taught by Wayne.

Mother told us children many stories of the dangers and hardships endured by her folks while clearing a homestead in that wilderness. Deer were so plentiful her father had seven hanging in the smoke-house at once. A neighboring family lived through one entire Winter on five bushels of turnips and seven bushels of hickory-nuts.—J. J. Coughlin.

Lancaster, Pa.

Was, and am, sincere in what I said about Mr. Pendexter's Indian stories. They supply the thrills which the real adventure lacks. Earl J. Teets, was correct; the man who is busy taking care of himself during an adventurous life has no time for thrills. Not because he lacks imagination but because just at the supreme moment his hands, feet and brain are occupied in more important work.

FOR example, suppose you were going to make a triple parachute drop. You arrive at an elevation of three thousand feet, cut away, and the first parachute opens nicely. You then cut away the next one, but she fails to open and must be got rid of at once. So, while you are falling through space like a bat out of ——, there's no time for delicious thrills with that ground covered with buildings and trolley-cars coming up to meet you. You get busy, kick the offending parachute out of the way, tear the next one lose from its fastenings, gently open a fold of its fabric and let the rushing torrent of air going by your ears do the rest with a jerk that brings you up standing.

This is no fiction, it has been done, and will be again, and that man will read Hugh Pendexter's stories to get thrills.

No imagination? Don't those people know it requires imagination and leisure moments to secure thrills by reading?

OF COURSE, like everybody else, I went through the "Dayton, Ohio, Flood." Counted forty-seven horses drowned before my window. One mule, only his bridle caught on an electric light pole and, with seventeen feet of water under him, he lasted four hours and ten minutes before sinking beneath the water. On Thursday morning at break of day the body of a man, whose upper chest was covered with snow, went bobbing by.

With buildings all around us burning and seventeen feet of water on sidewalk, many people on their knees offering up prayers, in which they beseeched the Almighty to cause the wind's direction to change and drive the fire in the other fellow's direction. We tore out electric lighting fixtures and secured the wire to construct a rope which would enable us to cross an alley and gain another building.

THE only thrill we succeeded in extracting from the Dayton Flood was this: A board, on which a kitten with a blue ribbon around its neck was sitting, came bobbing down that mill-race of a current. From the windows people would call "Kittie, Kittie," and the kitten would mew. Well, that was too much for a drunken guy who sat in the window of a hotel opposite us, so he threw off his clothes, hopped out of the window, swam to the kitten, reached up and, taking the kitten, placed it on his head and with it there swam back to the hotel. And, believe me, the fellow had a hard fight to make it.

HOW'S this? On patrol, looking for submarines, fly one thousand feet above for best view of depths under certain conditions, five hundred at other times, then again two thousand five hundred or three thousand feet. Try at all elevations, just as you would adjust a camera or glass for focus. The sub., we are told, will have appearance of a shadow, long and slim, but a large fish will also produce just such a shadow, so that when you do observe just such a shadow—and here's where you really do get a thrill, thinking of the pleasure of reporting a submarine, sighted and destroyed—you work down and over the spot; it moves; while reaching for wire which releases the depth-bomb you notice it has fins and, instead of a sub., for which you have for so long been looking and praying for a sight, it's a —— fish, and you're so badly disappointed you depress the machine-gun and pour a stream of bullets into him anyhow, and find you have killed a shark which looks to be twenty feet long.

Whales have met same fate, because of their resemblance to the Dutchman.

NOT long since the newspapers told you that, while flying in a fog, two sea-planes collided, one nose-diving, and her crew of three men were lost. But what the papers omitted was this: The crew of second plane immediately landed on spot where first plane disappeared beneath the waves, and one of the crew, name I can't recall, swam around the spot for forty minutes hoping some survivors were afloat in the vicinity, but none appeared. However, the nose of the injured plane did, just came once to the surface.—J. J. COUGHLIN.

PROBABLY it seems a simple matter just to gather together some of the letters that come in from comrades and have the printer put them into type for our Camp-Fire pages. It *is* a simple matter, looking at it that way. It looks easy to me, when I'm not doing it. But every time I start on it there's always a multitude of what are called "details" and often enough it's the smallest of them that take the most time. There's no use trying to explain why or what, because I never know myself till I'm into it.

Add also the fact that everything in "Camp-Fire" has to be timed for two months ahead, since magazines are made up in advance. Also the fact that it's impossible to index the letters waiting for publication, except in a most elementary way, because of their diversity of subject or subjects. And it's no small task to keep track of those that *have* been printed, to know just which issue, already out or in process of making, a certain item appeared in so as to turn back and see its exact relation to a new letter on a similar subject.

Sometimes I remember a letter very distinctly but can not for the life of me recall whether I have just read it myself, or whether it's been sent to the printer and not come down in galleys yet, or is in galleys but not put into page form, or in page form but in the printer's hands, or made up in a number not yet on the stands, or really and finally published and, if so, in what issue. Which means quite some little looking around at records before I can even start.

TAKE the following letter, for example. When I got it out from the drawer where Camp-Fire letters stay till they are ready to go to the printer it was very familiar to me. I recalled that I had written to Mr. Offley, that "Peas River" had never given us his right name or full address, that I'd tried a letter to his pen-name to the town from which his letter came and that I'd never received an answer.

But I couldn't remember for sure whether I had published an inquiry in "Camp-Fire" asking him for name and address. Thought I had, but couldn't be sure. Don't know yet and I'll be hanged if I have time to look back through some twenty issues of "Camp-Fire" to find out.

Also I had an idea the following letter had been published, but it came from the "unpublished" drawer and bears none of the marks of having gone to the printer.

I MENTION it merely as a sample case. It was written March 18, 1918, and must have reached us in April. The hunch that it had been published probably kept it in the drawer. If routine had been adhered to, it could not have been published, for the letter itself had not been to the printer and, being typewritten, no copy would have been made and sent to the printer. But sometimes a stenographer gets mixed and copies a typewritten letter and then any kind of confusion is possible.

You see, a letter may call for quite a few things after it's been read—the outgoing basket on my desk may receive it marked "id," "L. T. o. k.," "L. F.," "Camp," "desk," "A. A.," "copy," "?," "mail," "address," etc., sometimes three or four on one letter. Then, if the stenog——

That's enough. I just pestered you with all this to give you an idea of the detail and time involved so you'd be easy on me and understand that when I make mistakes in these matters I'm not necessarily an idiot. Now I'll quiet down and give the letter I should have published long ago.

And, Peas River, where are you, and who are you? Or will you write to Mr. Offley on the chance of his old address still being good, or trying his Virginia address?

U. S. S. Caesar,
Naval Station, Olongapo, P. I.

The world is certainly "small," the truth of which saying has once again been proved to me by reading, purely accidentally at that, the Camp-Fire in your magazine of March 3, 1918.

On page 180, happening in the most casual manner to open the copy which I had only a few minutes previously purchased in Olongapo, my eyes fell on a letter which on the next page was signed "Peas River." This individual says that he went to Dodge City, Kansas, in '78—went to work for Bob Wright and Jim Langton. My father, then major of the 19th United States Infantry, was at that time in command of Fort Dodge, where I joined him in 1879. In 1881, still at Fort Dodge, although my father had been relieved by Colonel G. O. Haller, of the 23rd United States Infantry, I married Jim Langton's youngest sister (Ena), remaining at old Dodge until a breakdown in health drove me out of Kansas to Southern Texas (Fort Brown, Brownsville). My own life has been a roving one since then, although I have for some time owned a nice home and a business of my own in Charlottesville, Virginia.

I am at all times glad to hear of or from acquaintances—most of whom I flatter myself were friends—of my youth, and I should be delighted to enter into communication with "Peas River." Do you mind helping me to reach him, either by forwarding this letter to him or giving me his name and address?—EDW. H. OFFLEY, Paymaster.

P. S.—When I arrived the first time at Fort Dodge, George Curry, who in later life made such a good name for himself and did such good work wherever he was put, was taking care of Jim Langton's horses, etc. Lordy, Honey! How dis worl' do move and keep on a-movin'!

THE following appeal will, I know, meet with response from Camp-Fire. Theodore Roosevelt still has a warm place in the hearts of most of us, both as a great American and as a man. In general I believe that money should go to the present and the future, not to the past, but in this case it is not easy to withhold tribute, for recognition of his real Americanism will help build us better Americanism in the future.

Roosevelt Memorial Association

The Roosevelt Memorial Association has been formed to provide memorials in accordance with the plans of the National Committee, which will include the erection of a suitable and adequate monumental memorial in Washington; and acquiring, development and maintenance of a park in the town of Oyster Bay which may ultimately, perhaps, include Sagamore Hill, to be preserved like Mount Vernon and Mr. Lincoln's home at Springfield.

In order to carry this program to success, the Association will need a minimum of $10,000,0000, and so that participation in the creation of this memorial fund may be general, it asks for subscriptions thereto from millions of individuals.

Colonel Roosevelt was the greatest American of his generation. He blazed the trail which this nation must travel. Unselfish and sincere in purpose, unswerving in seeking the right and following it, definite and direct in action, with his theory of personal responsibility for wrong-doing and his creed of "the square deal" for all, he gave a lifetime of devoted public service which must stand as an inspiration to the youth of this land for all time. Ardently American, believing profoundly that only through fullest acceptance of America's privileges and responsibilities could the people of this country realize their highest well-being and fulfill their obligations to themselves and to humanity, he set up ideals which it is not only a duty but a privilege to follow.

A memorial to this man will not so much honor him as honor America and the citizens who raise it to him. A contribution to the Roosevelt Memorial will be, in the highest sense, a pledge of devotion to ideal citizenship. Checks may be sent to Albert H. Wiggin, Treasurer, Roosevelt Memorial Association, 1 Madison Avenue, New York City.

WILLIAM BOYCE THOMPSON,
President, Roosevelt Memorial Association,
1 Madison Avenue, New York City.

LOOKING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRACY

SOME of you have tried to make *Adventure* take sides on Prohibition. *Adventure* does not and will not do so. Speaking for myself personally, not for the magazine or for myself as its editor, I am entitled to my personal opinion and have no hesitation about giving it. I have used liquor for a good many years and I have been drunk, though not for some eight years. I am for Prohibition. It seems to me a simple matter. If people, including myself, haven't sense and strength enough to keep from injuring themselves with liquor, drugs or other poisons they are to be congratulated when they get common-sense enough to put the poisons where they can't reach them.

I do not approve the methods by which Prohibition was put through, nor some of the ridiculous extremes of its enforcement. For one thing it was unfair to make the decision when so many voters were away in uniform, giving themselves to the country's service. But if prohibition was made law by questionable methods or not in entire accordance with our Constitutional, legal machinery, it is our own fault if we have permitted methods and machinery that are not fully democratic. Yet I've heard Americans howling to high heaven over the undemocratic method of its passing. As if they themselves weren't just as responsible for that as anybody else on earth! For once we've had the concrete result of our bad citizenship jammed down our throats so hard we *had* to see it, and I'm darned glad we had the lesson. We needed it.

Then there is the wail about "infringement of my personal liberties." If you are one of these wailers *let me ask you what the hell you've ever done to deserve any personal liberty!* Voted now and then, maybe; served in the war, maybe; paid taxes, maybe; obeyed the laws, maybe. And therefore probably consider yourself a good citizen. Where did you get the insane idea that *that* was enough to make a good citizen? What do you expect a government to be and do for you in return for *that?* Can you expect it to have any regard for your "personal liberty" or to be any more than an unthinking machine if you have had only so cold a regard for *it*, have done no thinking for *it?*

It can give back to us only what we give to it. It is a pair of scales, a bargain. What we put into it will come back to us sooner or later and, though we can not write down the account in a ledger, its action is as relentless as granite. We get back what we put in, no more, no less, no worse, no better.

Before you wail over what you get, remember what you put in.

That is my personal opinion on Prohibition and, to me, Prohibition itself is the least important issue that has been raised by the event. If you don't believe it, try thinking it over from some broader point of view than the question of whether or not you can crook your fingers around a whiskey-glass.

No, don't write in to argue with me. It isn't *Adventure's* opinion or mine as its editor; merely my personal view to which I'm fully entitled, and I can find plenty of arguers without using office time for it. And if some crooked-minded fool thinks either side has "subsidized" either the magazine or me, he is, well, mistaken. He'd better give his time to considering himself as an American citizen who has done his full duty—maybe.

ARE you a party man? A Democrat, Republican or any of the others? If you are, are you willing to admit it?

Why not be an American instead?

Is there any one of the political parties that isn't working for its own interests before the interests of the country and the people as a whole?

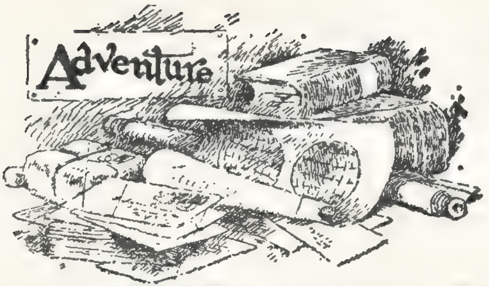
What *is* a political party?

At best—and in theory only—merely a piece of machinery for helping express the people's will. At its worst—what it really is in this country today—a piece of machinery for enabling politicians to further their personal ambitions and selfish greed, to prevent a full, real expression of the people's will and to gather control of the many into the hands of a few.

Even a fairly dull-witted American can see the evil and danger of letting Capital, Labor or any other one class or "few" control things. But when the "few" doesn't happen to be a class in itself many Americans are too dull to see that control by them is equally evil and dangerous.

Aren't you tired of seeing Congress, for example, settle national questions (most of which have really nothing to do with the question of party) on party lines? And the evil has gone on so long that it's accepted as a matter of course.

Why shouldn't our representatives, and we ourselves, be Americans first and always? The man who boasts he has voted any one party ticket for ten or twenty years is not only a pitiable dupe but a very poor American.—A. S. H.



VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn in lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL BUY: Mid-February, 1918; First April, 1918; August, 1917; November, 1915; October, 1914; April, 1915, at regular price or $1.00 for set, post-paid.—WALTER EVANS, 69 Gilmour Street, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

WILL BUY: Back issues from July, 1917, to November, 1917, also First April issue, 1919. Kindly state price including postage.—S. MARKLE, 80 Prospect St., Patterson, N. J.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 1833 S St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received to-day is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts

Captain A. E. Dingle, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1

Beriah Brown, Seattle Press Club, 1309 Fifth Ave., N. E. Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2

Captain A. E. Dingle, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1

Raymond S. Spears, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2

Hapsburg Liebe, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3

Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1

Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson, care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2

John B. Thompson, P. O. Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

9. Western U. S. Part 1

E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

10. Western U. S. Part 2 and
Mexico Part 1

J. B. Whiteaker, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs; topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

11. Mexico Part 2 Southern

Edgar Young, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce.

12. North American Snow Countries Part 1

R. S. Spears, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Minnesota and Wisconsin. Hunting, fishing, trapping; canoes and snowshoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

★(*Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in coin NOT stamps*)

Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada.

13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 3
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., covering south-eastern Ontario and the lower Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 4
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 5
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 6
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

18. North American Snow Countries Part 7
H. S. BELCHER, The Hudson's Bay Company, Ft. Alexander, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, MacKenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

19. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

20. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and MacDougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

21. South America Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and MacDougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

22. South America Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, The Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

23. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

24. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, Box 807A.—R. F. D. No. 10, Los Angeles, California. Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports; manufacturing.

25. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan: Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

26. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

27. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Eagle Bird Mine, Washington, Nevada Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

28. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

29. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

30. ★ Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N.W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, 7 Place de Tertre, Paris, XVIII, France. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

31. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

32. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shotguns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. THOMPSON, Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, Box 1374, St. Louis, Mo. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen. Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

The following "Ask Adventure" editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Major A. M. Lochwitzky.

If You Go to Alaska

HOW can you get there? What ought you to take? Where should you locate for prospecting, trapping or hunting? There's a right way and a wrong way to go into Alaska. One may mean success, the other is pretty sure to mean failure. Mr. Solomons, who spent many years in our vast northern territory. tells you the right way:

Question:—"Another man and myself have decided to go to Alaska on the first boat out of Seattle in the Spring. We believe that will give us ample time to find a good location before Winter sets in.

Our stay will be indefinite. We intend to trap during the Winter and do some placer prospecting during the Summer months. We have both had some trapping experience and don't expect any trouble in that line.

We will start from Seattle with from $1,500 to $2,000 between us, and believe that we should be able to get a fairly good outfit for considerably less than that.

Our plans are to get into some part of the country that isn't too densely populated. Conditions not considered as long as there is enough game to make it a paying proposition. We have both served a number of years in the Army and are used to roughing it under all conditions.

We believe that if you will furnish us with the following information, that we will get along nicely:

1. Route to take from Seattle to Circle City.
2. Good places to locate for placer prospecting in the Summer and trapping during the Winter months. Somewhere to the north of Circle City.
3. Supplies needed for three men for about a year, without replenishing.
4. Where to make purchases of supplies, clothing and equipment—Seattle or up north.
5. Necessary clothing and equipment.
6. Firearms.
7. Traps. Intend to go into it extensively.
8. When does the first Spring boat leave Seattle?
9. What is the fare and expense from Seattle to Circle City by water?
10. Name some of the more common fur-bearing animals to be found in that district."—H. B. S., Camp Kearny, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—You are choosing the most northerly region of interior Alaska for your stamping ground—and you will get a maximum of Winter and a minimum of Summer. The "Circle" means the Arctic Circle, which hits the Yukon about here—the most northerly point reached by the river. It's probably as good a place to prospect in as any other region of Alaska—north of the river, in the wild country toward the Arctic watershed. And, as for trapping, that ought to be pretty fair also, and the pelts are sure prime.

But there is a general agreement among mining men that the place to go for gold is just where it has been found. It is never a drawback just because all the ground is staked—quite the contrary. No one holds on to staked ground very long, and it's gamble enough to try to find the extensions of the paystreaks of paying claims without going out into the illimitable landscapes of Alaska looking for the stuff. The prospector in new country has a one to ten thousand chance of making a fortune, or a one to one thousand chance of making a little stake, and a one to one hundredth chance of making the price of the flour and bacon he eats. You can always do better trapping, but to make real money at it requires talent—and a large measure of the trader's instinct.

I'd hesitate a long, long time before I'd put $2,000 into a couple of men's outfits (again, for I did it once). I'd take the money up there, in the form, preferably, of drafts hard to cash. And I'd knock around and work for others, or trap a little in a small way, or shovel in, or cut wood, and get around over the country and learn it, and soon you'd find a chance to invest some of that $2,000 where it would make you twenty. Cash is king—in Alaska as elsewhere. Say, if you knew how much hard experience is packed into the last few lines you'd engrave them at the head of every page of the pad you use when you figure out outfits, traveling expenses, and so forth, when you plan your trip.

However, *Adventure* likes me to answer questions, so here goes:

"Densely populated." Fear not. There ain't no such animal in Alaska. A few miles out of any of the big towns—which would be called villages in the States—and you are in the wilds.

1. Take a ticket to Circle via the inside passage, Skaguay and Dawson.

2. Pretty well answered above. Go anywhere.

3. Supplies for three men for a year—food supplies, that is—is a matter of choice, to some extent, and very much a matter of confidence in your ability to get fresh meat and fish. I'd figure on taking only enough animal food to give yourselves a little variety—and that's canned stuff and ham and bacon principally. Pork and beans, flour, rice and other cereals, plenty of dried fruits, especially apples, apricots and prunes (unless you dislike either) and twice as much condensed milk (Eagle brand, NOT evaporated "cream") and sugar as your most liberal allowance, together with plenty of coffee and a little tea, and of course a small quantity of lots of other things, will constitute your food supplies. Cooked, sliced, evaporated potatoes and other dehydrated vegetables are also a very desirable thing to take—from the point of view of health, particularly. They have much of the value of the fresh. Butter is a good thing to take, too—it is put up in two pound tins, with salt water around it and as is good as the best fresh creamery butter at first and plenty good enough for two or three years. You make your bread with sour dough, and, occasionally, for variety, you use baking-powder.

Among the desirable extras are raisins, nuts, brown sugar, corn-starch, plenty of chocolate, a little beef extract, tinned cheese, and such like. Now the proportions of these things is fairly definite, but such is the variation of individual tastes, not definite enough to prescribe exact amounts. You will want about two pounds of the above kinds of food (*i.e.*, dry) per day per man, assuming you kill your meat. Otherwise, three pounds is the allowance. One and a half pounds of dry to about the same of fresh meat and fish is the actual consumption, but the extra half pound is added for spoilage, wastage, accident, etc., *and* miscalculation of quantities, which always results in your getting out of one thing while still having slathers of some other thing.

To get your proportions, go out camping for a week, and eat as you expect to in Alaska, weighing before you go and when you return every article of the diet. Then add fifty to seventy-five per cent. to the heat foods—butter, sugar, milk, and fat (bacon or pork) and decrease the others (except flour, which leave alone) by twenty per cent., and you'll have it. By decreasing the others twenty-five per cent. I mean merely this: If you have used twenty pounds of the heat producers, call their consumption thirty to thirty-five pounds. And then decrease other foods (except flour) by four pounds; that is, twenty per cent. of twenty pounds. The net result will be to raise the amount of food you consume by quite a little, and this is just what you ought to do because you eat more in the North, where the cold requires the use of more body fuel.

4. Buy in Seattle, if you find after inquiring of the agents of the store at Circle (The Northern Commercial Co. probably) as to prices there that you can save at least fifteen or twenty per cent. If your calculated saving is less, buy at Circle, for, after you have suffered losses and hazards of transit—spoilage, deterioration, moulded hams, and the like—you will be none the gainer. But light-weight, expensive foods usually are better bought in Seattle. For instance, chocolate, tea, coffee, that sort of thing, cost little in freight, while the added price in the North is just as much, usually, as in the case of heavy staples. I usually advise people to outfit in Alaska, but this is because most people do not know exactly where they are going after they get there, and an outfit anchors a party. So, if you are not sure you are going to strike out from Circle, do not burden yourself with an outfit, for you can always get what you want in Alaska.

5. Necessary clothing is pretty definite, and so is equipment, but the odds and ends are matters of personal whim. If you are going to land in Circle in June—(which is as early as you can get in—you will have to boat your outfit up one of the tributaries, or else wait for snow in late October, when the snow is first dependable, and sled it up. It's a big job, in either case, but the boating is least expensive.

You will want heavy wool underwear and slathers of sox, and a few German sox. Also a pair of gold-seal hip rubber boots, and one pair of good, stout common shoes. The main part of your footwear will be shoe-packs and moccasins, which you will get up there. Then you want two or three pairs of good overalls, and a jumper of same material, and a few heavy all-wool shirts. Buy a Stetson felt hat and get a light fur cap with no fur in or on the crown, but only around the sides. Get them there (you can't be sure of getting the right thing here) pure wool, short mittens, a dozen pair apiece, and strong buck- or horse-hide gauntlet outer mitts—two or three pair at least. A pair of gloves is sometimes convenient for Fall or Spring, but not otherwise. Don't let any one sell you a lined mitt, that is, leather outside and alleged wool inside, or a double wool mitt. Get just what I tell you and thank me later; for I know the hand and footwear game as well as Peary or Amundsen, at least.

The secret of fighting cold is looseness, and wool, or fur, inside, and skin, hide, outside, as to hands and feet, and either skin, or fur, or close-woven cotton (drilling or duck) outside as to the body. These are the principles. Master them and you have acquired a volume of northern lore for the open.

Just another rather obvious principle—dryness. DON'T let your clothing remain damp in cold weather. That's one reason for the separate mitts and separate socks, etc. You can take them apart, hang them up and dry them every night and sometimes at noon. A man whose inside clothes are wool, air-tight material (that is, nearly;—outside, loose and dry, and with fuel in his belly, is proof against anything in the way of temperature that is known on this planet. Of course he's got to exercise or else bundle up in warm outer garments. But in walking about or any other activity, and given the above conditions, he is O. K. with comparatively little clothing.

Now, over your blue shirt (and jumper, in cold weather) you will wear a drill parka, or, in quite cold weather, a muskrat, squirrel or reindeer parka. That (or those) you will get up there. And your clothing is now complete. As to bedding, a reindeer sleeping-bag is the best. Next to that comes a bag made of carded wool comforters, two or three, each sewed one end and three-quarters of one side, used one, two or three stuffed into each other, covered by a brown duck bag made the same way, with a bolster effect at the head of it for stuffing extra clothes in for a pillow, and a flap to go over your head if caught out in a storm. This is light bedding, easily taken apart and dried, and suitable for Summer as well as Winter.

For outfit, you want a light 10 by 12 tent with four-foot walls, a good, heavy sheet-steel Yukon stove (got up there) with an oven and four or five joints of five- or six-inch pipe, open along the seams for telescoping, the best few pots and common frying pan in two sizes that money can buy, together with small tools, a double-bitted falling ax and a single-bitted chopping ax, with two extra helves for each, one light drift pick and an extra helve, two long handled shovels, a boy's ax, a "broad" hatchet (beveled on the right side only) a cross-cut saw, a draw knife, a chisel or two, an inch and a half or two inch ship's augur, a brace and set of bits, baling wire, two hammers and plenty of nails and a few spikes, a little pitch and oakum, a hundred feet of ⅜ inch manilla rope and the same amount of ½ inch; a medium calibre, high-powered rifle and a small caliber shotgun, or two shotguns or even two rifles if you think both of you will want to use a rifle at once, and of course your traps—mostly for small game—one bear trap is enough. They weigh like the deuce. A dozen files, mostly flat, and a whet or oil stone; plenty of matches (common "block" preferred, with absolutely water-tight receptacles for some of them to repose in all the time; water-tight dunnage bags for your clothes, etc., extra suspenders and leather belt, a hunting knife apiece, if you just must have one (they are pretty useless) two or three butcher knives are preferable, one of them a skinning knife, of course; two fair sized brown duck tarpaulins, and that's about all, except your small personals, like sewing materials, toilet articles, odds and ends, which you can take lots of, and ought to, for they save lives and don't weigh much. Don't forget antiseptics, and the simpler remedies, though nobody is ever sick in Alaska.

In this answer is included answers to 6 and 7 also.

8. The first boat leaves Seattle for Skaguay, to put people through to the Yukon along about May, but you can't get down the river with any certainty till June.

9. The fare to Circle by water (and that's the only way you can get there) is about $100 up, according to whether you go first or second class.

10. The fur-bearers of the district include wolf, fox, mostly red and white, some lynx, occasionally

small bear; semi-occasionally, cariboo (millions if you hit their "runs"); you *might* get a moose, but it's a little north, mountain sheep perhaps (I am including all sorts of animals, but *all* animals are fur-bearers at this latitude), land otter and plenty of the finest mink and some marten; better farther south—that is, better quantities of them, and muskrats till you can't rest, if you get the proper marshy country for them. Also weasel (or ermine) and a not very valuable, except for clothing, kind of squirrel. You might nab a wolverine once in a while.

The Caroline Islands

SOME timely information about the great group of islands taken from Germany during our late war. Also—are there any who can answer the last question in this letter? Is it another South Sea mystery? Write us, should you know aught of the Throckmartin party:

Question:—"I enclose a stamped, addressed envelope, in which may I request what information possible about the Caroline Islands as to size, resources, etc. Also route of travel.

May I also request if you are able to furnish any information about the ill-fated expedition of Dr. David Throckmartin and party to those islands. If unable to furnish, please state where I may obtain such."—R. W. RUBLE, Churubusco, Ind.

Answer, by Capt. Dingle:—The Carolines make a big subject to treat in the space of a letter. There are some 600 islands, the largest being only about 140 square miles. The group belonged to Germany, but is now under the flag of one of the Allied powers. About 50,000 population derive their living from ivory nuts, copra, pearl shell and turtles and sea-slugs. So far as I can recall there are no regular steamers running to Ponape from this country, and only a small service going that way from Australia; but plenty of island schooners call at Ponape and Babelthouap. I think you will get all the information you seek regarding these islands in a book called "The Caroline Islands," by F. W. Christian, which any reputable bookseller will procure for you.

Concerning the Throckmartin party, I can not help you at all. Are you sure there was such a party? Or have you read some fiction which impressed itself upon you as fact? I have not heard of any Throckmartin expedition, but of course there may have been such a one for all that; perhaps an inquiry addressed to the National Geographic Society at Washington may bring information.

Southwestern Quebec

QUEBEC is hard to beat when it comes to game and fish. Plenty of timber, also, and easily reached. "Canuck" Sangster tells of the River duMoine and adjoining territory:

Question:—"I would like some information regarding the southwestern part of Quebec. I am planning a trip of several months' duration perhaps, and I expect to start from Pembroke, Ont., up the Ottawa River, and then up one of the smaller rivers into Quebec.

The river I have in mind is the River duMoine, and I wish to find out how far up this stream is navigable for a canoe. How about the hunting, both large and small game? What fur-bearing animals are found in this locality? Are there many settlements? Also, has all of this country been timbered off?"—F. S. P., Guelph, Ont.

Answer, by Mr. Sangster:—The River duMoine, or any of those emptying into the Ottawa, is navigable—that is, for the canoe; and, remembering that portaging is necessary at various falls and rapids. I think you could get up to its headwaters.

Large game would consist of deer, a few moose; possibly and chance of bear. Most of the fur-bearers home here, although whether plentiful or not I can not say, as fur fluctuates. At present the hare or snowshoe rabbit is practically a nonentity, and, as a consequence, the fox and lynx are scarce.

Possibly, if you wrote to Mr. E. T. D. Chambers, Dept. of Col'n, Fish and Game, Quebec, you could obtain more detailed data on this trip than I have available. There is considerable timber of smaller growth, such as poplar, birch, jackpine and spruce.

I would be rather inclined to recommend some of the newer waters west of Cochrane for such trips —better fishing, more game and better fur country.

To Be a Maine Fire Warden

THIS is the sort of job that should appeal to upstanding men who know the big woods. Plenty of chance for adventure; good pay; and, best of all, a life in the clean outdoors:

Question:—"I am seeking information regarding a position as fire warden in the State of Maine. Where must a man apply for a job and what wages does he receive? Can a man take his family with him? Would a telephone engineer stand a good chance for a job? What would one want to take for an outfit? Please give me all the information you can regarding this matter."—E. C. HART, Belfast, Me.

Answer, by Dr. Hathorne:—In making an application for position as fire warden, you should write to Forest H. Colby, Forest Commissioner, Augusta, Me. If you can get the endorsement of some timber land owner, it may help you out in landing a job. The wages are $3 per day, seven days per week, and no time lost during rainy weather.

As a rule, they do not care to have a man take his family with him, unless he makes his headquarters in a town or village.

A man with a knowledge of telephone engineering would stand a good show of getting a job, providing there was one vacant. It would depend on where a man was going as to the outfit he would need.

All of the look-out men on the mountains are provided with camps, and many of the patrolmen in the northern part of the State the same. Some of the men board at lumber camps and some of them tent out. In the latter case a man would need a camping outfit.

Some men use a canoe a good part of the time, and others follow the roads. Board is not included in the pay. Each man furnishes his own board. Ordinary rough clothing is all right, with moccasins for foot-wear.

The Cook Islands, Samoa and New Guinea

IF YOU thirst for adventure, to explore, to hunt, to meet strange, almost unknown tribes, then visit the South Seas. There you'll find, as Mr. Mills says, "the land where dreams come true."

Question:—"I desire information concerning the Cook Islands and Samoa. Has Samoa been fully explored? What is formation of islands?

What animals live on the Samoan Islands? What are the opportunities for an adventurer, explorer, or sportsman?"—F. M. HALLUM, Giant, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—There are six islands in the Cook Group, and easily the most popular of these, Raratonga, is only some 20 miles in circumference and about two miles in width. You can understand that they do not need much exploration. Raratonga's range rises to 2,100 feet. Lesser known Niue has an area of 100 square miles of a circumference of 40 miles. The Cook Islands are volcanic and coral.

Samoa is a somewhat different proposition. There are two of them: American Samoa, of which Tutuila is the principal, with your consul residing at Apia (write to him for further information), and German Samoa. Immediately after Germany declared war, an expeditionary force was sent from New Zealand, and succeeded easily (practically bloodlessly) in capturing Samoa from the Germans. We have no records as to whether the Germans explored the island of Upolu (which has an area of 345 square miles) and Savati, 660 square miles. I have my doubts. You can ask the American Consul at Apia just what his people have done in the way of exploration.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

WILLMAN, WM. J. A sailor paid off at the U. S. S. *Wisconsin* in the Fall of 1918. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write.—Address FRANK DORMAN, R. F. D. 5, Scranton, Iowa.

GALE, DAVID J. Missing since August, 1918. When last seen weighed 180 lbs., had light blue eyes and a hooked nose. He was a sea steward and clerk. Age about fifty-seven. Communicate with son.—Address HOWARD GALE, 137 W. Sharpuack St., Germantown, Penna., or No. 8297 care *Adventure.*

ECHOLS, LON. San Antonio, Texas, former home. Last seen on road between Escalon and Jiminez, Chihuahua, Mex., on May 21, 1919. Any information as to his and his companion's present address will be gratefully appreciated.—Address JULES BROCHAMP, care Lost Trails Dept. *Adventure,* No. 376.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

BARTLETT, GEO. H. Civil Engineer. Formerly connected with the U. S. Geological Survey in the Indian Territory in 1896-1897-1898. Later was with the Ind. Terr. Townsite Comm. Any information will be appreciated.—Address GEO. H. MEEK, 3058 Fifth Ave., Sacramento, Calif.

OHLSON, O. S. Formerly of Capac, Mich. Traveled as ticket agent for "Parker's Show." Last heard from at St. Louis, Mo., 1917. Has been seen at Galesburg, Ill., and Des Moines, Ia., since. Any information will be appreciated. Please write.—Address BENJ. S. NELSON, Bessmay, Texas.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound uames asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

CLAYTON, FRANK, relatives of. Born January 23, 1887, in New York City. Adopted from an orphans' home there when two years and ten months old by Mr. and Mrs. Dominick Barret of New Richmond, Wis. Shall be very grateful for any information.—Address FRANK H. BARRET, New Richmond, Wisconsin.

GASKILL, L. B., of Virginia, ex-Navy man. May be in U. S. Merchant Marine Service. Last heard of in either Gibraltar or Malaga, Spain, early in the Spring of 1919. Any information will be appreciated by his old shipmate.—Address GEORGE PENTREATH, 1107 Cortlandt St., Peekskill, N. Y.

KELLY, ROBERT E. Last seen in Alliance, Neb., January 28, 1919. I am suffering from a fall I had here—expect to be laid up all Summer. Probably will return to Carson when able to. Write.—Address A. L. BATES, 437½ So. 2nd East St., Salt Lake City, Utah.

McGRATH, PVT. THOS. EDWARD. Last heard of in 132nd Inf., Camp Logan, Houston, Texas, in May, 1918. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address PVT. THOS. V. McGRATH, Co. E., 37th Inf., Terlingua, Texas, Santa Helena Outpost.

FIOCK, FORREST THURMAN, of Denver, Colo. Last heard of at the end of 1913, then working on the street railway. Have important information for him. Please write.—Address BERNARD F. BOLAN, care *Adventure* No. 377 L. T.

ALELIUNAS, ALEX. Last heard of 1910 in Chicago. Left home in Russia about twenty-two years ago. Any information will be appreciated by his brother. Write. —Address MARTIN ALELIUNAS, 923 Rohns St., Detroit, Michigan.

COOKE, HARRY MALCOLM. Disappeared from Bayside January sixth last—probably gone West. Seventeen years of age, five feet ten inches, weight about one hundred and fifty-five pounds, blue eyes, brown hair, medium complexion with a few small moles, one front tooth filled with gold, and one pivoted. Any information will be appreciated by his father.—Address THOS. COFFIN COOKE, Johns Ave., Bayside, L. I.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

JOYNT, HARRY, Brother. Age about forty-six, native of Salford, Lancs, England. Came to U. S. about twenty-four years ago with a friend named Pearson, whose mother he stayed with in Detroit about twenty years ago. Is believed to be working on the Grand Trunk Railway at St. Catherines, or some similar name. Mother and father still living. Please write.—Address RENNIE JOYNT, S. S. *Adian*, Booth Line, 17 Battery Place, New York.

LAW, FRANCIS GORDON, Husband. Last heard of in Nov., 1918, then belonging to The Foreign Legion Flying Corps. Thirty years of age, five feet nine inches in height, blue eyes, fair complexion, and wears glasses. Electrical engineer by trade. Lived most of his life in St. Louis, Mo. When last heard of his address was Hotel Stavia, Paris, France, 23 Rue Gotot Mauroy. Please write MRS. FRANCIS GORDON LAW, R. D. No. 1, Box 12, Lorain, Ohio.

NUCKLES, FRITZ. Card fitter by trade, employed by Evan Leigh & Co., Boston, Mass. Worked at the Kingston Ont. Mill of the Dominion Textile Co., and went from there to Halifax, N. S. Was supposed to have enlisted in a Montreal Overseas Battalion in the Fall of 1916. Was a resident of Atlanta, Ga., at the time I knew him. Any information will be gratefully appreciated.—Address B. W. MCQUAID, 48 E. Moira Ave., Belleville, Ont., Canada.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the First September or Mid-September issues of Adventure. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine:

AUSTELL, PERCY W.; Blitz, or Bliss, Joe; Breese, Lieut. Sidney V. C.; Burrill Grammar School Girls and Boys; Duncan, Ed. and Ellis; Duringer, Allan A.; Flattery, Michael A.; Gordon, Mrs. Aaron; Hall, Will G. E.; Hellman, Wm.; Johnson, J. H.; Karstead, Mrs. Frank; Kelly, Wynnie; Kenner, Alfred W.; Lenning, Harry Gollander; MacDonald, James; Neiger, B.; Parker, Jos. S.; Phillip, Frank; Pleasant, Mr. and Mrs. Karl; Pollen, James; Relatives of Macmillian, Louis Knotte; Smith, Dr. Hulbert S.; Spiers, John; Thomas, Herbert Jerome; Franklin, Eugene; Tucker, Frances O.; Van Wassel, Charlie; Wright, Tom.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; G. H. Bennett; Bryon Chrisholm; Wm. S. Hilles; A. B. Paradis.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity.

ARNOLD, TED; Aspinartos, A.; Allison, Corp. James T.; Brady, Grover C.; Brison, Clarence F.; Bishop, L. O.; Benson, E. W.; Babcock, Lucius A.; Beaton, G. M.; Carr, Mrs. Fred; Cosby, Arthur F.; Collins, John; Coles, Bobby; Campbell, Frank U.; Dorr, H. S.; Engelby, B.; Geers, Mrs.; Harvey, Ted; Hines, Joseph; Harris, Walter J.; J. C. H.; Hart, Jack; Harding, James; Harrison, Tillson L.; Hunt, Dan'l O'Connel; Johnson, Walter R.; Kuckaby, William; Kohn, Edward; Lee, Wm. R.; Lofler, Mrs. Harry; Leighton, Capt.; Larisy, Jack; Lee, C.; "Lonely Jock"; MacDonald, Donald Carr; MacMahon, J. A.; MacNarnee, Alva I.; Miller, B. J.; Morrisy, K. A.; McCord, P. A.; Maples, C. M.; McGraw, John; Nelson, Frank Lovell; Nichols, Leon; Norman, Cook William; Richards, Lewis S.; Reid, Raymond; Rodgers, Stewart; Reed, H. W.; Schmidt, Walter; Scott, James F.; Seaman, W. E.; Shephard, H. O.; St. Stanley, Jack; Swan, George; Taylor, Jim; Von Gelucke, Byron; Wetherell, Delos, E.; Williams, Bertram I.; Williams, Ray; Williams, W. P.; Western, S. S.; Yelton, Roy T.; Young, Leon.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you. —Address E. F. BRACE, care *Adventure.*

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MID-OCTOBER NUMBER

CAPTAIN TRISTTAM'S MIRACLE *By Charles Beadle*
'Enery Saunders, steward on the *Coronet*, tries hard to wreck the greasy tramp steamer; then comes a modern miracle.

THE GULCH OF THE LONESOME WINDS *By Robert J. Horton*
In the end, only the winds are left to moan the fearful secret of the gulch.

THE PEARLS OF PARUKI *By J. Allan Dunn*
They were easily worth a hundred thousand dollars, but besides them, *John Fleming* fights for something he would not even attempt to value.

WHEN CIVIC PRIDE HIT PIPEROCK *By W. C. Tuttle*
It strikes with a bang and a crash, leaving the Montana town more or less of a wreck.

THE SLOTH *By Arthur O. Friel*
One day he became a man, and the story of his smashing fight against wild men is still told at the steaming headwaters of the Amazon.

ROCK CREEK JIM RIPPLEMEAD'S BOY *By Hapsburg Liebe*
His daddy stretched hemp, but the tiny Tennessee boy, with his Winchester, shows how a mountaineer can defend his good family name.

LYNCH LAWYERS. Part IV *By William Patterson White*
Red Kane proves that a cowboy can make a good sleuth and finds all clues to the Farewell mystery leading to excitement and danger.

INDIAN FANATICISM *By E. A. Brininstool*
Invincible courage in the face of certain death is the form of fanaticism displayed by these two Cheyenne boys.